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A Calendar of Upcoming Events

May 18-May 19, 1975: Intersociety Engineering Ethics Conference (IEEE, ASME, ASCE, AIChE, NSPE) at Baltimore, Maryland. Info: Meetings Inquiries, IEEE, 345 East 47th Street, New York City 10017.

May 23-May 26, 1975: EQUICON 75/FILMCON 3 (Star Trek and Film-oriented conference) at El Cortez Hotel, San Diego, California. Registration: $10 until May 1; $15 thereafter; $5 nonattending. Info: Post Office Box 15757, San Diego, California 92115.

May 24-May 26, 1975: DISCLAVE (Washington, DC area regional SF Conference) at Sheraton-Park Hotel, Washington, DC. Registration: $3 until May 20; $4 thereafter. Info: Alexis Gilliland, 4030 Eighth Street South, Arlington, Virginia 22204.

May 29-June 1, 1975: VUL-CON 2 (Star Trek oriented conference) at Braniff Hotel, New Orleans, Louisiana. Registration: $8 in advance; $10 at the door. Info: Post Office Box 8087, New Orleans, Louisiana 70182.

May 30-June 1, 1975: KUBLA KHAN KHUBED at Rodeway Inn, Nashville, Tennessee. Guest of Honor, Andrew J. Offutt; Master of Ceremonies, Frank Kelly Freas. Registration: $7 in advance; $8 at the door. Info: Ken Moore, 647 Devon Drive, Nashville, Tennessee 37220.

August 14-August 17, 1975: AUSSIECON 75 (33rd World Science Fiction Convention) at Southern Cross Hotel, Melbourne, Australia. Guest of Honor, Ursula K. Le Guin. Fan Guests of Honor, Mike Glicksohn and Susan Wood. Info: Box 4039, Melbourne 3001 Australia. US Agents: Jack Chalker, 5111 Liberty Heights Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland 21207; or Fred Patten, 11863 W. Jefferson Boulevard, #1, Culver City, California 90230. Canadian Agent: John Millard, 86 Broadway Avenue, #18, Toronto, Ontario M4P 1T4, Canada. Registration: $12 attending; $4 nonattending.

—ANTHONY R. LEWIS

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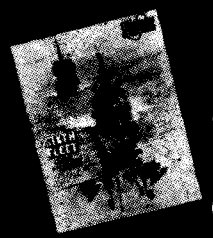

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NOVELETTES

THE STORMS OF WINDHAVEN, Lisa Tuttle and George R. R. Martin 12
NASCENT, Michael Sutch 66
COUNTRY OF THE MIND, W. Macfarlane 105

SHORT STORIES

A SCRAPING AT THE BONES, Algis Budrys 136
TWO HEADS ARE BETTER THAN ONE, Spider Robinson 151

SCIENCE FACT

TURING POINT, Thomas A. Easton 93

READER'S DEPARTMENTS

THE EDITOR'S PAGE 5
THE ANALYTICAL LABORATORY 167
THE REFERENCE LIBRARY, Lester del Rey 169
BRASS TACKS 174
IN TIMES TO COME 177

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editorial

by their fruits

The trouble is, I'm a time-traveler.

I've stood on the wooden bridge in Concord, where a scared and badly-organized band of farmers briefly faced up to the trained professionals of the British Army. I've looked out at the Massachusetts countryside from that bridge and realized what those farmers knew: this land is worth fighting for.

I grew up during World War Two, and heard about a young Air Corps officer named Colin P. Kelly who kept his cripped B-17 aloft long enough for his crewmen to bail out safely, then dove the plane into a Japanese warship, killing himself. And of Joe Schmidt, the Marine from Philadelphia, who stayed at his machinegun during an all-night Banzai attack on Guadalcanal, despite being permanently blinded by a grenade explosion in the first few minutes of the battle.

Nearly every day I walk past the spot in New York where a young schoolteacher named Nathan Hale was hanged as a spy by the British. And I think to myself of all the young men over the past two-hundred-some years who have given their lives to preserve, protect and defend this nation. All those anonymous hundreds of thousands, who never spoke as eloquently as Hale, nor died as dramatically as Colin Kelly, but who put their lives on the line because—at heart—they were convinced that this nation is something worth fighting for, worth dying for.

And then I observe today's scene. I see men who swore on Holy Bibles, before television audiences that spanned the globe, to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States of America. I read the transcripts of their tape-recorded words, and see the consequences of their actions, and I realize that either they had no intention of taking their oaths seriously or they haven't the faintest idea of what the Constitution and our nation are all about.

I see men who have sworn to faithfully uphold the laws of the United States deliberately breaking those laws, ordering the CIA to spy

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on American citizens—which is specifically prohibited by law—while making pious public pronouncements about law and order. And I wonder what Hale, and Kelly, and Schmidt, and all the rest of what used to be called our honored dead would have done if they could have known what they were helping to bring about.

The Founding Fathers knew that our form of government is an experiment. Large-scale democracy, even in the indirect form adapted by the framers of the Constitution, had never been tried before. Two centuries down the time stream, the experiment still has not produced definitive results. It just may be that large-scale democracy can no longer work in a society where the decision-making power is so far removed from the people.

By their fruits you shall know them.

Law and order cannot flow from a government that considers the laws as irrelevant and subsidiary to its political goals, anymore than peace and fellowship can flow from the philosophy espoused in *Mein Kampf*.

And a democratic form of government cannot exist among a people who take little or no interest in the workings of government. The most insidious, deadly poison stemming from *l'affaire Watergate* is the lassitude and air of resignation among the voters. Any American citizen who blandly claims, "What can you do? All politicians are like that," is asking for more and worse than Watergate.

By their fruits . . .

When the Nixon Administration first came to office, and Vice President Spiro Agnew began to attract national attention by attacking the press and the electronic news media, my ex-newspaperman's ears tingled. "Why attack a press that's been generally so favorable?" I asked myself. "Unless there's something going on that they don't want the press to find out," was the second half of my thought. No, I assured myself, that's just a knee-jerk reaction from an ex-reporter. It wasn't until nearly five years later that it turned out that Agnew himself had plenty to hide, including accepting bribes in the very office of the Vice President.

Jefferson looks like a saint from this distance in history, but during his lifetime he was attacked by the press in terms that would shock a modern politician. Yet when he became President, he allowed the Alien and Sedition Laws—John Adams' method of jailing those who publicly disagreed with him—to expire. Not only that, but the Jefferson who wrote about the inalienable rights of man also said:

". . . were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter."

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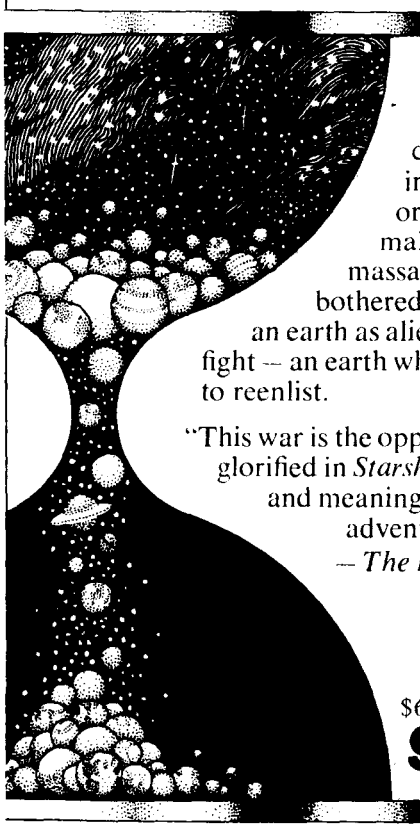
"A certain candidate for top SF awards." —Chicago Daily News

THE FOREVER WAR

JOE HALDEMAN



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The man had faith in the American people! Fellow time-travelers, he had faith in you and me.

Maybe Jefferson was an airy theorist who made lovely pronouncements that didn't work in the rough-and-tumble of real-world politics? How about James Madison's thoughts on the subject:

"A popular Government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy; or, perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance: And a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives."

How many people do you know who got sick and tired of hearing about Watergate? How many American voters shut their eyes and ears to the doings of their own Government? How many German citizens did the same when the Nazis were carting off their neighbors to the death camps?

Corruption is an ugly word, but a time-traveler who scans the past two centuries of American history and studies the present political and social climate of the United States cannot help but feel that we have a very corrupt situation on our hands. And this corruption exists at the heart of American politics, among the voters, the people who have the power to make changes but lack the foresight and the guts.

The average voter simply does not exercise his or her sovereign power. Trotting out to the polling booth on election day is too late. The real power struggle lies in the very early days of the political campaigns, when the local and national party structures pick the candidates that end up on the ballot.

And look at the campaigns themselves. The candidates have become nothing but plastic images, parroting public relations slogans and evading every possible issue. When's the last time you saw a candidate behave the way Harry Truman did in 1948, when he insisted on a strong Civil Rights plank in the Democratic Party's platform? Even when told that the Southern delegates would walk out and form a third party, Truman preferred to keep faith with his conscience rather than sell out to the Dixiecrats. Can you picture any recent candidate, from the two Presidential candidates of 1972 on down to your local mayor or councilman, facing an issue so straightforwardly?

The real genius of the 1972 Presidential campaign was the way in which the Nixon campaigners were able to cut the electorate into myriads of tiny, self-seeking pressure groups, and promise each one of them that the particular little goodie that they wanted would be given to them by the Nixon forces. Aid to Israel? Sure, it's good for

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the Jewish vote. Reform the welfare system? No, that would frighten the blue collar vote. More defense spending? Yes, it'll win votes wherever there's a military base or a defense factory.

Seen narrowly, this is good politics. After all, it produced a landslide of votes, didn't it? But politics is more than winning elections. After the election, the winner must govern. Hopefully, he and his associates will govern wisely and, in Lincoln's phrasing, "for the people."

Taking this broader view, a time-traveler is tempted to speculate that by dividing the electorate into self-seeking power groups, the politicians lost sight of the needs of the *nation*, as a whole. What's worse, their pandering to the narrow interests of the voters allowed the voters to lose sight of the fact that we're all in this big socio-political experiment together, and what's good for your pocketbook in the short term might have disastrous consequences on your whole family's life style in the long run.

The social unrest, the energy problems, the inflation and economic recession that are making a shambles of our economy, the collapse of our educational system, the cynicism and despair among the people—all these are the result of taking the narrow, self-seeking view and avoiding the painful but necessary attack on the vast social and economic problems that beset us.

Nixon is not the sole villain in this scenario. Long before he reached the White House, the national political stance had become, "Here's your slice of the pie; don't worry about anything else." Whatever shortcomings John Kennedy might have had, at least he told us that his job wasn't to make life easy for us; he challenged us to do our best, and we reached the Moon as a result.

Science fiction teaches us to be time-travelers. We learn to think in terms of centuries, not years. And if we look forward only a few decades, we can see that real disaster awaits us—unless we stop our piecemeal, stopgap politics, and begin to come up with tough, real answers to the tough, real problems that face us. The dike is leaking badly, we're running out of thumbs, and it looks like rain.

The answers will not be easy to come by. Nor will they be very popular. For the fact is that our society must change. To most people, change is fearsome; they are terrified that they'll have to give up something that they've now got. The rioting in Boston over school bussing has nothing to do with education; the good neighbors of South Boston fear an influx of poor blacks into their homeland. What they fear, they resist.

We need political leaders who can lead, rather than follow the results of the latest public relations

continued on page 177

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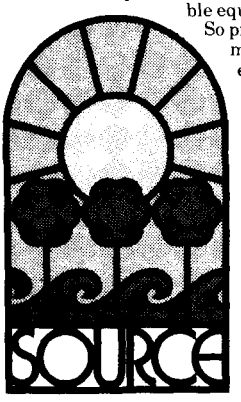

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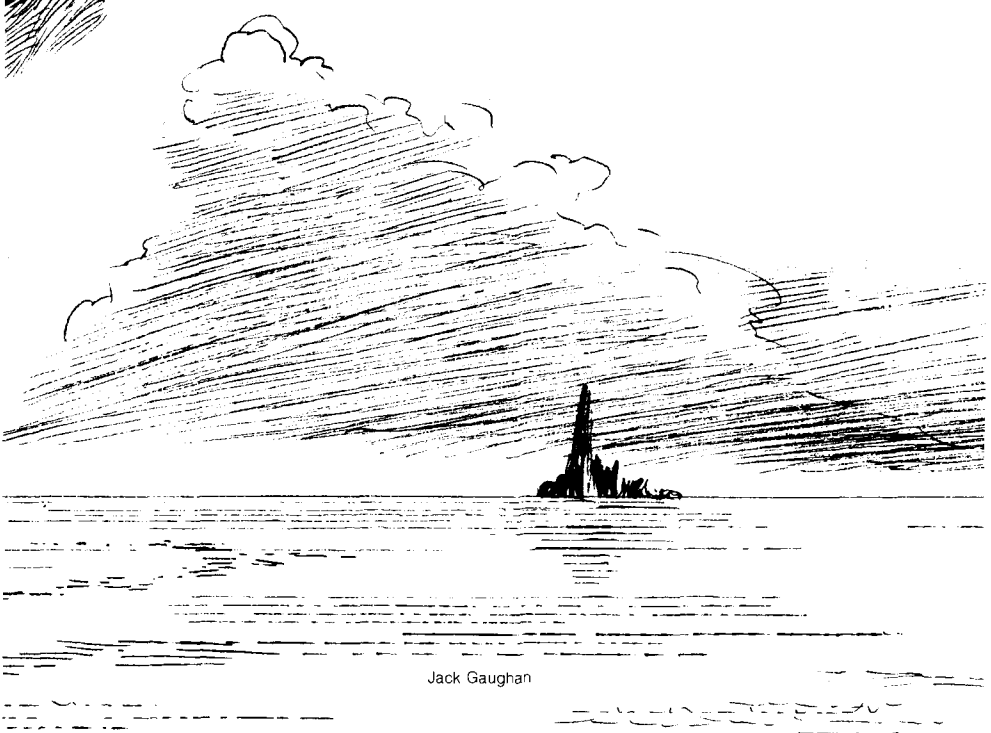
the storms of Windhaven

"For once you have tasted flight you will
walk the earth with your eyes turned skyward;
for there you have been,
and there you long to return." *(Leonardo da Vinci)*

LISA TUTTLE
GEORGE R.R. MARTIN



Jack Gaughan

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Maris rode the storm ten feet above the sea, taming the winds on wide cloth-of-metal wings. She flew fiercely, recklessly, delighting in the danger and the feel of the spray, not bothered by the cold. The sky was an ominous cobalt blue, the winds were building, and she had wings; that was enough. She could die now, and die happy, flying.

She flew better than she ever had before, twisting and gliding between the air currents without thought, catching each time the updraft or downwind which would carry her farther or faster. She made no wrong choices, was forced into no hasty scrambles above the leaping ocean; the tacking she did was all for joy. It would have been safer to fly high, like a child; up above the waves as far as she could climb, safe from her own mistakes. But Maris skimmed the sea, like a *flyer,* where a single dip, a brush of wing against water, meant a clumsy tumble from the sky. And death; you don't swim far when your wingspan is twenty feet.

Maris was daring, but she knew the winds.

Ahead she spied the neck of a scylla, a sinuous rope dark against the horizon. Almost without thinking, she responded. Her arms, outspread and strapped to the underside of the forward wing strut, shifted slightly. The great silver wings—tissue thin and almost weightless, but immensely strong—shifted with her. One wingtip all but grazed the whitecaps snapping below, the other lifted; and Maris caught the rising winds more fully, and began to climb.

Death, sky death, had been on her mind, but she would not end like that; snapped from the air like an unwary gull, lunch for a hungry monster.

Minutes later she caught up to the scylla, and paused for a taunting circle just beyond its reach. From above she could see its body, barely beneath the waves, the rows of slick black flippers beating rhythmically. The tiny head, swaying slowly from side to side atop the long neck, ignored her. Perhaps it has known flyers, she thought then, and it does not like the taste.

The winds were colder now, and heavy with salt. The storm was gathering strength; she could feel a trembling in the air. Maris, exhilarated, soon left the scylla far behind. Then she was alone again, flying effortlessly, through an empty, darkening world of sea and sky where the only sound was the wind upon her wings.

In a time, the island reared out of the sea: her destination. Sighing, sorry for the journey's end, Maris let herself descend.

Gina and Tor, two of the local land-bound—Maris didn't know what they did when they weren't caring for visiting flyers—were on duty out on the landing spit. She circled once above them to catch their attention, and they rose from

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the soft sand and waved at her. The second time she came around they were ready. Maris dipped lower and lower, until her feet were just inches above the ground; Gina and Tor ran across the sand parallel to her, each beside a wing. When her toes brushed surface and she began to slow in a shower of sand, they each caught a wingtip and held.

Maris dragged them several feet, and the three of them left a triple gouge down the landing spit. But finally she was stopped, lying face-down on the cool, dry sand. She felt silly. A downed flyer is like a turtle on its back; she could get on her feet if she had to, but it was a difficult, undignified process. Still, it had been a good landing.

Gina and Tor rose, brushing themselves off. As Maris struggled to stand, they began to fold up her wings, joint by foot-long joint. As each strut unlocked and folded back on the next segment, the tissue fabric between them went limp. When all the extensors were pulled in, the wings hung in two loose folds of drooping metal from the central axis strapped to Maris' back.

"We'd expected Coll," said Gina, as she folded back the final strut. Her short dark hair stood out in spikes around her face.

Maris shook her head. It should have been Coll's journey perhaps, but she had been desperate, longing for the air. She'd taken the wings—still *her* wings—and gone before he was out of bed.

"He'll have flying enough after next week, I expect," Tor said cheerfully. There was still sand in his lank blond hair and he was shivering a little from the sea winds, but he smiled as he spoke. "All the flying he'll want." He stepped in front of Maris to help her unstrap the wings.

"I'll wear them," Maris snapped at him, impatient, angered by his casual words. How could he understand? How could *any* of them understand? They were land-bound.

She started up the spit toward the lodge, Gina and Tor falling in beside her. There she took the usual refreshments and, standing before a huge open fire, allowed herself to be dried and warmed. The friendly questions she answered curtly, trying to be silent, trying not to think: this may be the last time. Because she was a flyer, they all respected her silence, although with disappointment. For most of the land-bound the flyers were the only source of contact with the other islands. The seas, infested with scyllas and seacats and other predators and daily storm-lashed, were too dangerous for regular ship travel except among islands within the same local group. The flyers were the links, and the others looked to them for news, gossip, songs, stories, romance.

"The Landsman will be ready whenever you are rested," Gina

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said, touching Maris tentatively on the shoulder. Maris pulled away, thinking, yes, to you it is enough to serve the flyers. You'd like a flyer husband, Coll perhaps when he's grown—and you don't know what it means to me that Coll should be the flyer, and not I. But she said only, "I'm ready now. It was an easy flight. The winds did all the work."

Gina led her to another room, where the Landsman was waiting for her message. Like the first, it was long and sparsely furnished, with a blazing fire crackling in a great stone hearth. The Landsman sat in a cushioned chair near the flames, and rose when Maris entered. Flyers were always greeted as equals, even on islands where the Landsmen were worshipped as gods and held godlike powers.

After the ritual greetings had been exchanged Maris closed her eyes and let the message flow. She didn't know or care what she said. The words used her voice without troubling her conscious thought. Probably politics, she knew. Lately it had all been politics.

When the message ended, Maris opened her eyes and smiled at the Landsman—perversely, on purpose, because he looked worried by her words. But he recovered quickly and returned her smile. "Thank you," he said, a little weakly. "You've done well."

She was invited to stay the night, but she refused. The storm might die by morning; besides, she liked night flying. Tor and Gina accompanied her outside, and up the rocky path to the flyers' cliff. There were lanterns set in the stone every few feet, to make the twisting ascent safer at night.

At the top of the climb there was a natural ledge, made deeper and wider by human hands. Beyond it, a forty-foot drop, and breakers crashing on a rocky beach. There Gina and Tor unfolded her wings, and locked the struts in place, and the tissue metal stretched tight and taut and silvery. And Maris jumped.

The wind caught her, lifted. She was flying again, dark sea below and rumbling storm above. Once launched she never looked back at the two wistful land-bound following her with their eyes. Too soon she would be one of them.

She did not turn toward home. Instead she flew with the storm winds, blowing violently now, westerly. Soon the thunder would come, and rain, and then Maris would be forced up, above the clouds, where the lightning was less likely to burn her from the sky. At home it would be calm; the storm past. People would be out beachcombing to see what the winds had brought, and a few small dories might be casting off in the hope that a day's fishing might not be entirely lost.

The wind sang in her ears and pushed at her, and she swam in the sky-stream gracefully. Then, oddly,

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she thought of Coll. And suddenly she lost the feel. She wavered, dipped, then pulled herself up sharply, tacking, searching for it. And cursing herself. It had been so good before—did it have to end this way? This might be her last flight ever, and it had to be her best. But it was no use: she'd lost the certainty. The wind and she were no longer lovers.

She began to fly at cross-purposes to the storm, battling grimly, fighting until her muscles were strained and aching. She gained altitude now; once the wind-feel left you, it was not safe to fly so near the water.

She was exhausted, tired of fighting, when she caught sight of the rocky face of the Eyrie and realized how far she had come.

The Eyrie was nothing but a huge rock thrust up from the sea, a crumbling tower of stone surrounded by an angry froth where the waters broke against its tall, sheer walls. It was not an island; nothing would grow here but pockets of tough lichen. Birds made their nests in the few protected crevices and ledges, though, and atop the rock the flyers had built their nest. Here, where no ship could moor, here where no one but flyers—bird and human—could roost, here stood their dark stone lodge.

"Maris!"

She looked up at the sound of her name, and saw Dorrel diving on her, laughing, his wings dark against the clouds. At the last possible moment she turned from him, banking sharply, and slipped out from under his dive. He chased her around the Eyrie, and Maris forgot that she was tired and aching, and lost herself in the sheer joy of flying.

When at last they landed, the rains had just begun, howling suddenly from the east, stinging their faces and slapping hard against their wings. Maris realized that she was nearly numb with cold. They came down in a soft earth landing pit carved in the solid rock, without help, and Maris slid ten feet in sudden-mud before coming to a stop. Then it took her five minutes to find her feet, and fumble with the triple straps that wrapped around her body. She tied the wings carefully to a tether rope, then walked out to a wingtip and began to fold them up.

By the time she was finished, her teeth were chattering convulsively, and she could feel the soreness in her arms. Dorrel frowned as he watched her work; his own wings, neatly folded, were slung over his shoulder. "Had you been out long?" he asked. "I should have let you land. I'm sorry. I didn't realize. You must have been with the storm all the way, just in front of it. Difficult weather. I got some of the crosswinds myself. Are you all right?"

"Oh, yes. I was tired—but not

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really, not now. I'm glad you were there to meet me. That was good flying, and I needed it. The last part of the trip was rough—I thought I would drop. But good flying's better than rest."

Dorrel laughed and put his arm around her. She felt how warm he was after the flight and, by contrast, how cold she was. He felt it too and squeezed her more tightly. "Come inside before you freeze. Garth brought some bottles of *kivas* from the Shotans, and one of them should be hot by now. Between us and the *kivas* we'll get you warm again."

The common room of the lodge was warm and cheerful, as always, but almost empty. Garth, a short well-muscled flyer ten years her senior, was the only one there. He looked up from his place by the fire and called them by name. Maris wanted to answer, but her throat was tight with longing, and her teeth were clenched together. Dorrel led her to the fireplace.

"Like a woodwinged idiot I kept her out in the cold," Dorrel said. "Is the *kivas* hot? Pour us some." He stripped off his wet, muddy clothes quickly and efficiently, and pulled two large towels from a pile near the fire.

"Why should I waste my *kivas* on you?" Garth rumbled. "For Maris, of course, for she is very beautiful and a superb flyer." He made a mock bow in her direction.

"You should waste your *kivas* on me," Dorrel said, rubbing himself briskly with the big towel, "unless you would care to waste it all over the floor."

Garth replied, and they traded insults and threats in laconic voices. Maris didn't listen—she had heard it all before. She squeezed the water from her long hair, watching the patterns the wetness made on the hearth stones and how quickly they faded. She looked at Dorrel, trying to memorize his lean, muscular body—a good flyer's body—and the quick changes of his face as he teased Garth. But he turned when he felt Maris watching him, and his eyes gentled. Garth's final witticism fell limply into silence. Dorrel touched Maris softly, tracing the line of her jaw.

"You're still shivering." He took the towel from her hands and wrapped it around her. "Garth, take that bottle off the fire before it explodes and let us all get warm."

The *kivas* was served in great stone mugs, a hot spice wine flavored with raisins and nuts. The first sip sent thin lines of fire down her veins, and the shivering stopped.

Garth smiled at her. "Good, isn't it? Not that Dorrel will appreciate it. I tricked a slimy old fisherman out of a dozen bottles. He found it in a shipwreck, didn't know what he had, and his wife didn't want it in the house. I gave him some trinkets for it, some metal beads I'd picked up for my sister."

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"And what does your sister get?" Maris asked, between sips of *kivas*.

Garth shrugged. "Her? Oh, it was a surprise, anyway. I'll bring something from Poweet the next time I go. Some painted eggs."

"If he doesn't see something else he can trade them for on his way back," Dorrel said. "If your sister ever gets her surprise, Garth, the shock will kill all pleasure. You were born a trader. I think you'd swap your wings if the deal was good enough."

Garth snorted indignantly. "Close your mouth when you say that, bird." He turned to Maris. "How is your brother? I never see him."

Maris took another sip of her drink, holding on to calm with both hands. "He'll be of age next week," she said carefully. "The wings will be his, then. I wouldn't know about his comings and goings. Maybe he doesn't like your company."

"Huh," said Garth. "Why shouldn't he?" He sounded wounded. Maris waved a hand, and forced herself to smile. She had meant it lightly. "I like him well enough," Garth went on. "We all like him, don't we, Dorrel? He's young, quiet, maybe a bit too cautious, but he should improve. He's different somehow—oh, but he can tell some stories! And sing! The land-bound will learn to love the sight of his wings." Garth shook his head in wonder. "Where does he learn them all? I've done more traveling than him, but . . ."

"He makes them up," said Maris.

"Himself?" Garth was impressed. "He'll be our singer, then. We'll take the prize away from Eastern at the next competition. Western always has the best flyers," he said loyally, "but our singers have never been worthy of the title."

"I sang for Western at the last meet," Dorrel objected.

"That's what I mean."

"*You* shriek like a seacat."

"Yes," said Garth, "but I have no delusions about my ability."

Maris missed Dorrel's reply. Her mind had drifted away from their dialogue, and she was watching the flames, thinking, nursing her still-

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warm drink. She felt peaceful here in the Eyrie, even now, even after Garth had mentioned Coll. And strangely comfortable. No one lived on the flyers' rock, but it was a home of sorts. Her home. It was hard to think of not coming here any more.

She remembered the first time she'd seen the Eyrie, a good six years ago, just after her coming-of-age day. She'd been a girl of thirteen, proud of having flown so far alone, but scared too, and shy. Inside the lodge she'd found a good dozen flyers, sitting around a fire, drinking, laughing. A party was in progress. But they'd stopped and smiled at her. Garth had been a quiet youth then, Dorrel a skinny boy just barely older than she was. She hadn't known either of them. But Helmer, a middle-aged flyer from the island closest to hers, had been among the company, and he made the introductions. Even now she remembered the faces, the names; red-headed Anni from Culhall, Foster who later grew too fat to fly, Jamis the Senior, and especially the one nicknamed Raven, an arrogant youth who dressed in black fur and metal and had won awards for Eastern in three straight competitions. There was another too, a lanky blonde from the Outer Islands. The party was in her honor; it was seldom any of the Outers flew so very, very far.

They'd all welcomed Maris, and soon it seemed almost as if she'd replaced the tall blonde as the guest of honor. They gave her wine, despite her age, and they made her sing with them, and told her stories about flying, most of which she'd heard before, but never from such as these. Finally, when she felt very much part of the group, they let their attentions wander from her, and the festivities resumed their normal course.

It had been a strange, unforgettable party, and one incident in particular was burned golden in her memory. Raven, the only Eastern wing in the group, had been taking a lot of needling. Finally, a little drunk, he rebelled. "You call yourselves flyers," he'd said, in a whiplash voice that Maris would always recall. "Come with me, I'll show you flying."

And the whole party had gone outside, to the flyers' cliff of Eyrie, the highest cliff of all. Two hundred feet straight down it plunged, to where the rocks stared up like teeth and the water churned furiously against them. Raven, wearing folded wings, walked up to the brink. He unfolded the first three joints of his wing struts carefully, and strapped them on his arms. But he did not lock them; the hinges still moved, and the struts bent back and forth with his arms, flexible. The other struts he held, folded, in his hands.

Maris had wondered what he was up to. She soon found out.

He ran and jumped, out as far as

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he could, off the flyers' cliff. With his wings still folded.

She'd gasped, run to the edge. The others followed, some looking pale, a few grinning. Dorrel had stood beside her.

Raven was falling straight down, a rock, his hands at his sides, his wing cloth flapping like a cape. Head first he flew, and the plunge seemed to last forever.

Then, at the very last moment, when he was almost on the rocks, when Maris could almost feel the impact—silver wings, suddenly, flashing in the sunlight. Wings from nowhere. And Raven caught the winds, and flew.

Maris had been awed. But Jamis the Senior, the oldest flyer Western had, only laughed. "Raven's trick," he growled. "I've seen him do it twice before. He oils his wing struts. After he's fallen far enough, he flings them away as hard as he can. As each one locks in place, the snap flings loose the next one. Pretty, yes. You can bet he practiced it plenty before he tried it out in front of anyone. One of these days, though, a hinge is going to jam, and we won't have to listen to Raven any more."

But even his words hadn't tarnished the magic. Maris often had seen flyers, impatient with their land-bound help, draw their almost-open wings up over their heads and shake out the last joint or two with a sharp snap. But never anything like this.

Raven had been smirking when he met them at the landing pit. "When you can do *that,*" he told the company, "then you can call yourselves flyers." He'd been a conceited, reckless sort, yes, but right at that moment and for years afterwards, Maris had thought herself in love with him.

She shook her head sadly, and finished her *kivas.* It all seemed silly now. Raven had died less than two years after that party, vanished at sea without a trace. A dozen flyers died each year, and their wings usually were lost with them; clumsy flying would down and drown them, long-necked scyllas had been known to attack unwary skimmers, storms could blow them from the sky, lightning hunted out the metal of their wings—yes, there were many ways a flyer could die. Most of them, Maris suspected, just lost their way, and missed their destination, flying on blindly till exhaustion pulled them down. A few perhaps hit that rarest and most feared menace of the sky: still air. But Maris knew now that Raven had been a more likely candidate for death than most; a foolish flashy flyer with no sky sense.

Dorrel's voice jarred her from her memories. "Maris," he said, "hey, don't go to sleep on us."

Maris set down her empty cup, her hand curved around the rough stone, still seeking the warmth it had held. With an effort, she pulled

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her hand away and picked up her sweater.

"It's not dry," Garth protested.

"Are you cold?" asked Dorrel.

"No. I must get back."

"You're too tired," Dorrel said. "Stay the night."

Maris drew her eyes away from his. "I mustn't. They'll worry."

Dorrel sighed. "Then take dry clothes." He stood, went to the far end of the common room, and pulled open the doors of a carved wooden wardrobe. "Come here and pick out something that fits."

Maris did not move. "I'd better take my own clothes. I won't be coming back."

Dorrel swore softly. "Maris. Don't make things—you know that—oh, come, take the clothes. You're welcome to them, you know that. Leave yours in exchange if you like. I won't let you go out in wet clothes."

"I'm sorry," Maris said. Garth smiled at her while Dorrel stood waiting. She got up slowly, pulling the towel more closely around her as she moved away from the heat of the fire. With Dorrel she searched through the piles of clothes until she found trousers and sweater that fit. Dorrel watched her dress, then quickly found clothes for himself. Then they went to the rack near the door, and took down their wings. Maris briefly checked the struts for weakness or damage; the wings seldom failed, but when they did, the trouble was nearly always in the joints. The fabric itself shone as soft and strong as it had when the star sailors rode it to this world. Satisfied, Maris strapped on the wings. They were in good shape; Coll would wear them for years, and his children for generations after him.

Garth had come to stand beside her; she looked at him.

"I'm not so good at words as Coll is, or Dorrel," he started. "I . . . well. Good-bye, Maris." He blushed, looking miserable. Flyers did not say good-bye to each other. But I am not a flyer, she thought, and so she hugged Garth, and kissed him, and said good-bye, the word of the land-bound.

Dorrel walked outside with her. The winds were strong, as always around the Eyrie, but the storm had passed. The only water in the air was the faint mist of sea-spray. But the stars were out.

"At least stay till moon-rise," Dorrel said. "We could have dinner—Garth and I would fight for the pleasure of serving you."

Maris shook her head. She shouldn't have come; she should have flown straight home and never said good-bye to Garth or Dorrel. Easier not to make the ending, easier to pretend that things would always be the same and then to vanish at the end. When they reached the high flyers' cliff, the same from where Raven once leapt so long ago, she reached for Dorrel's hand

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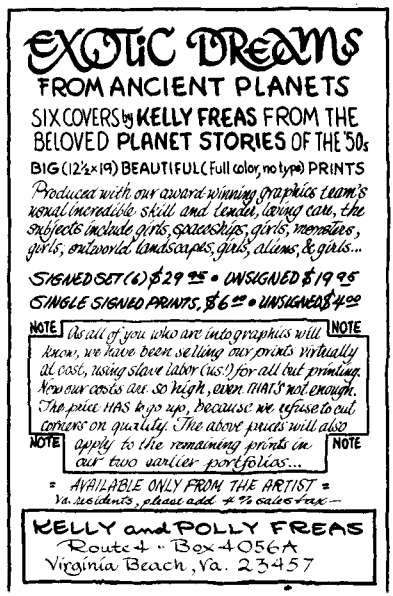
and they stood a while longer in silence.

"Maris," he said finally, hesitantly. He looked straight out to sea, standing by her side, holding her hand. "Maris, you could marry me. I would share my wings with you—you needn't give up flying entirely."

Maris dropped his hand, and felt herself go hot all over with shame. He had no right; it was cruel to pretend. "Don't," she said in a whisper. "The wings aren't yours to share."

"Tradition," he said, sounding desperate. She could tell he was embarrassed also. He wanted to help her, not to make things worse. "We could try it. The wings are mine, but you could use them . . ."

"Oh, Dorrel, don't. The Landsmen, your Landsmen, would never allow it. It's more than tradition, it's law. They might take your wings away and give them to someone with more respect, like they did to Lind the smuggler. Besides, even if we ran away, to a place without law or Landsmen, to a place by ourselves—how long could you bear to share your wings? With me, with *anyone?* Don't you see? We'd come to hate one another. I'm not a child who can practice when you're resting. I can't live like that, flying on sufferance, knowing the wings could never be mine. And you would grow tired of the way I would watch you—we would—oh." She broke off, fumbling for words.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Dorrel was silent for a moment. "I'm sorry," he said. "I wanted to do something—to help you, Maris. It hurts unbearably knowing what is about to happen to you. I wanted to give you something. I can't bear to think of you going away and becoming . . ."

She took his hand again and held it tightly. "Yes, yes. Shh."

"You do know I love you, Maris. You do, don't you?"

"And I love you, Dorrel. But—I'll never marry a flyer. Not now. I couldn't. I'd murder him for his wings." She looked at him, trying to lighten the bleak truth of her words. And failing.

They clung to each other, bal-

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anced on the edge of the moment of parting, trying to say everything they might ever want to say to each other now, with the pressure of their bodies. Then they pulled away, and looked at each other through tears.

Maris fumbled with her wings, shaking, suddenly cold again. Dorrel tried to help, but his fingers collided with hers, and they laughed, haltingly, at their clumsiness. She let him unfold her wings for her. When one of them was fully extended, and the second nearly so, she suddenly thought of Raven, and waved Dorrel away. Puzzled, he watched. Maris lifted the wing like an air-weary elder, and threw the final joint into lock with a clean strong snap. And then she was ready to leave.

"Go well," he said, finally.

Maris opened her mouth, then closed it, nodding foolishly. "And you," she said at last. "Take care, until . . ." But she could not add the final lie, any more than she could say good-bye to him. She turned and ran from him, and launched herself away from the Eyrie, out on the nightwinds into a cold dark sky.

It was a long and lonely flight over a starlit sea where nothing stirred. The winds were steady from the west, forcing Maris to tack all the way, losing time and speed. By the time she spotted the light tower of Lesser Amberly, her home island, midnight was past.

There was another light below, turning on their landing beach. She saw it as she coasted in, smooth and easy, and thought it must be the lodge men. But they should have gone off duty long ago; few flyers were aloft this late. She frowned in puzzlement just as she hit the ground with a jarring shock.

Maris groaned, hurried to get up, and set to work on the wing straps. She should know enough not to be distracted at the moment of landing. The light advanced on her.

"So you decided to come back," the voice said, harsh and angry. It was Russ, her father—stepfather, really—coming toward her with a lantern in his good hand, his right arm hanging dead and useless at his side.

"I stopped by Eyrie first," she said, defensively. "You weren't worried?"

"Coll was to go, not you." The lines of his face were set hard.

"He was in bed," Maris said. "He was too slow—I knew he'd miss the best of the storm winds. He would have caught nothing but rain, and it would have taken him forever to get there. If he did. He's not good in rain yet."

"Then he must learn to be better. The boy must make his own mistakes now. You were his teacher, but soon the wings will be his. He's the flyer, not you."

Maris winced as if struck. This was the man who had taught her to fly, who had been so proud of her

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and the way she seemed to know instinctively what to do. The wings would be hers, he'd told her more than once, though she was not of his blood. He and his wife had taken her in when it seemed that he would never father a child of his own to inherit the wings. He'd had his accident and lost the sky, and it was important to find a flyer to replace him—if not someone of his blood, then someone he loved. His wife had refused to learn; she had lived thirty-five years as a land-bound, and she did not intend to jump off any cliffs, wings or no. Besides, it was too late; flyers had to be taught young. So it was Maris he had taught, adopted, and come to love—Maris the fisherman's daughter, who would rather watch from flyers' cliff than play with the other children.

And then, against all probability, Coll had been born. His mother had died after the prolonged and difficult labor—Maris, very much a child, remembered a dark night full of people running, and later her stepfather crying alone in a corner—but Coll had lived on. Maris, suddenly a child-mother, came to care for him, love him. At first they didn't expect him to live. She was happy when he did; and for three years she loved him as both brother and son, while she practiced with the wings under her father's watchful eyes.

Until the night when the same father told her that Coll, baby Coll, must be given *her* wings.

"I am a far better flyer than he will ever be," Maris told him now, on the beach, her voice trembling.

"I do not dispute that. It makes no difference. He is my son."

"It's not fair!" she cried, letting out the protest that had been lodged inside her since that first time he had told her, on the day before she was to come of age and claim the wings as her own. By then Coll had been strong, healthy; still too small to bear the wings, but they would be his on his coming-of-age day. Maris had no claim, no right at all. That was the law of the flyers, stretching back through generations to the star sailors themselves, the legendary wing-forgers. The first-born child of each of the flying families would inherit the wings of the parent. Skill counted for nothing; this was a law of inheritance, and Maris came from a fishing family who had nothing to leave her but the scattered wreckage of a wooden boat.

"Fair or no, it is the law, Maris. You've known it for a long time, even if you chose to ignore it. For six years you've played at being a flyer, and I've let you, because you loved it, and because Coll needed a teacher, a skilled one, and because this island is too big to rely on only two flyers. But you knew all the while this day would come."

He could be more kind, she thought wildly. He must know what it means, to give up the sky.

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"Now come with me," he said. "You'll not fly again."

Her wings were still fully extended; only one strap was undone. "I'll run away," she said madly. "You'll never see me again. I'll go to some island where they don't have a flyer of their own. They'll be glad to have me, no matter how I got my wings."

"Never," her father said, sadly. "The other flyers would shun the island, like the Easterns did after the mad Landsman of Kennehut executed the Flyer-Who-Brought-Bad-News. You would be stripped of your stolen wings no matter where you went. No Landsman would take the risk."

"I'll break them, then!" Maris said, riding the edge of hysteria. "Then he'll never fly either, any more than . . . than . . ."

Glass shattered on rock and the light went out as her father dropped the lantern. Maris felt his grip on her hands. "You couldn't even if you wanted to. And you wouldn't do that to Coll. But give me the wings."

"I wouldn't . . ."

"I don't know what you wouldn't do. I thought you'd gone out to kill yourself this morning, to die flying in the storm. I know the feelings, Maris. That's why I was so frightened, and so angry. You mustn't blame Coll."

"I don't. And I would not keep him from flying—but I want to fly so badly myself—Father, please." Tears ran down her face in the dark, and she moved closer reaching for comfort.

"Yes, Maris," he said. He could not put his arm about her; the wings got in the way. "There is nothing I can do. This is the way of things. You must learn to live without wings, as I have. At least you've had them for a time—you know what it is like to fly."

"It's not enough!" she said, tearful, stubborn. "I used to *think* it would be, when I was a little girl, not even yours yet, just a stranger, and you were Amberly's greatest flyer. I watched you and the others from the cliff and I used to think—if I could have wings, even for a moment, that would be life enough. But it isn't, it *isn't*. I can't give them up."

The hard lines were all gone now in her father's face. He touched her face gently, brushing away tears. "Perhaps you're right," he said, in a slow heavy voice. "Perhaps it was not a good thing. I thought—if I could let you fly for a while, a little bit—that would be better than nothing, it would be a fine bright gift indeed. But it wasn't, was it? Now you can never be happy. You can never be a land-bound, really, for you've flown, and you'll always know how you are imprisoned." His words stopped abruptly and Maris realized that he was talking of himself as much as her.

He helped her unstrap and fold

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the wings and they walked back home together.

Their house was a simple wood frame, surrounded by trees and land. A creek ran through the back. Flyers could live well and easy. Russ said good-night just inside the door and took the wings upstairs with him. Has he really lost all trust? Maris thought. What have I done? And she felt like crying again.

Instead she wandered into the kitchen, found cheese and cold meat and tea, and took them back into the dining room. A bowl-shaped sand candle sat in the center of the table. She lit it, ate, and watched the flame dance.

Coll entered just as she finished, and stood awkwardly in the doorway. "'Lo, Maris," he said uncertainly. "I'm glad you're back. I was waiting." He was tall for a thirteen-year-old, with a soft slender body, long red-blond hair, and the wispy beginnings of a mustache.

"'Lo, Coll," Maris said. "Don't just stand there. I'm sorry I took the wings."

He sat down. "I don't mind, you know that. You fly a lot better than me, and—well—you know. Was Father mad?"

Maris nodded.

Coll looked grim and frightened. "It's only one week away now, Maris. What are we going to do?" He was looking straight down at the candle, not at her.

Maris sighed, and put a gentle hand on his arm. "We'll do what we must, Coll. We have no choice." They had talked before, she and Coll, and she knew his agony as much as her own. She was his sister, almost his mother, and the boy had shared with her his shame and his secret. That was the ultimate irony.

He looked up at her now, looking to her again as the child to the mother; although he knew now that she was as helpless as he, still he hoped. "Why don't we have a choice? I don't understand."

Maris sighed. "It's law, Coll. We don't go against tradition here, you know that. We all have duties put upon us. If we had a choice I would keep the wings, I would be a flyer. And you could be a singer. We'd both be proud, and know we were good at what we did. Life will be hard as a land-bound. I want the wings so much. I've had them, and it doesn't seem right that they should be taken from me, but maybe—maybe the rightness in it is something I just don't see. People wiser than we decided that things should be the way they are, and maybe I'm just being a child about it, wanting everything my own way."

Coll wet his lips, nervous. "No."

She looked a question at him.

He shook his head stubbornly. "It's not right, Maris, it just isn't. I don't want to fly, I don't want to take your wings. It's all so stupid. I'm hurting you and I don't want

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to, but I don't want to hurt Father either. How can I tell him? I'm his son and all that—I'm *supposed* to take the wings. He'd hate me. The songs don't say anything about flyers who were scared of the sky like I am. Flyers *aren't* afraid—I'm not meant for a flyer." His hands were shaking visibly.

"Coll, don't worry. It will be all right, really it will. Everyone is frightened at first. I was too." She wasn't thinking about the lie, only saying words to reassure him.

"But it's not fair," he cried. "I don't want to give up my singing, and if I fly I can't sing, not like Barrion, not like I'd like to. So why are they going to make me? Maris, why can't *you* be the flyer, like you want to be? *Why?*"

She looked at him, so close to crying, and felt like joining him in tears. She didn't have an answer, not for him or for herself. "I don't know," she said, her voice hollow. "I don't know, little one. That is the way things have always been done, though, and that is the way they must be."

They stared at each other, both trapped, caught together by a law older than both and a tradition neither understood. Helpless and hurt, they talked long in the candlelight, saying the same things over and over again until, late, they parted for bed, nothing resolved.

But once in bed alone, the resentment came flooding back to Maris, the sense of loss, and with it, shame. She cried herself to sleep that night, and dreamed of purple storm-skies that she would never fly.

The week went on forever.

A dozen times during those endless days Maris walked up to flyers' cliff, to stand helplessly with her hands in her pockets looking out over the sea. Fishing boats she saw, and gulls, and once a hunting pack of sleek gray seacats far, far off. It made her hurt the more, the sudden closing of the world she knew, the way the horizons seemed to shrink about her. So she stood there, lusting for the wind, but the only thing that flew was her hair.

Once she caught Coll watching her from a distance. Afterward neither of them mentioned it.

Russ had the wings now, *his* wings, as they had always been, as they would be until Coll took them. When Lesser Amberly needed a flyer, Corm answered the call from the far side of the island, or gay Shalli who had flown guard when Maris was a child first learning simple sky sense. As far as her father was concerned, the island had no third flyer, and would have none until Coll claimed his birthright.

His attitude toward Maris had changed too. Sometimes he raged at her when he found her brooding, sometimes he put his good arm around her and all but wept. He could not find a middle ground be-

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tween anger and pity; so, helpless, he tried to avoid her. Instead he spent his time with Coll, acting excited and enthusiastic. The boy, a dutiful son, tried to catch and echo the mood. But Maris knew that he too went for long walks, and spent a lot of time alone with his guitar.

On the day before Coll was to come of age, Maris sat high on flyer's cliff, her legs dangling over the edge, watching Shalli wheel in silver arcs across the noonday sky. Spotting seacats for the fishermen, Shalli had said, but Maris knew better. She'd been a flyer long enough to recognize a joy-flight when she saw one. Even now, as she sat trapped, she could feel a distant echo of that joy; something soared within her whenever Shalli banked, and a shaft of silvered sunlight blazed briefly from a wing.

Is this the way it ends? Maris asked herself. It can't be. No, this is the way it began. I remember.

And she did remember. Sometimes she thought she had watched the flyers even before she could walk, though her mother, her real mother, said that wasn't so. Maris did have vivid memories of the cliff, though; she'd run away and come here almost weekly when she was four and five and six. There—*here*—she'd sit, watching the flyers come and go. Her mother would always find her, and she would always be furious.

"You are land-bound, Maris," she'd say, after she had administered a spanking. "Don't waste your time with foolish dreams. I won't have my daughter be a Woodwings."

That was an old folk tale; her mother told it to her anew each time she caught her on the cliff. Woodwings was a carpenter's son who wanted to be a flyer. But, of course, he wasn't in a flying family. He did not care, the story said; he did not listen to friends or family, he wanted nothing but sky. Finally, in his father's shop, he built himself a beautiful pair of wings; great butterfly wings of carved and polished wood. And everyone said they were beautiful, everyone but the flyers; the flyers only shook their heads silently. Finally Woodwings climbed to flyers' cliff. They were waiting for him up there, wordless, circling and banking bright and quiet in the dawn light. Woodwings ran to meet them, and fell tumbling to his death.

"And the moral," Maris' mother would always say, "is that you shouldn't try to be something you're not."

But *was* that the moral? The child Maris didn't worry about it; she just dismissed Woodwings as an oaf. But when she was older, the story came back to her often. At times she thought her mother had gotten it all wrong. Woodwings had won, Maris thought. He *had* flown, if only for an instant, and that made it all worthwhile, even his death. It was a flyer's death.

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And the others, the flyers, they had not come out to mock him, or warn him off—no, they flew guard for him, because he was just a beginner, and because they understood. The land-bound often laughed at Woodwings; the name had become a synonym for fool. But how could a flyer hear the story and do anything but cry?

Maris thought of Woodwings then, as she sat in the cold watching Shalli fly, and the old questions came back. Was it worth it, Woodwings? she thought. An instant of flight, then death forever? And for me, was it worth it? A dozen years of stormwinds, and now a life without?

When Russ had first begun to notice her on the cliff, she was the happiest child in the world. A few years later, when he adopted her and pushed her proudly into the sky, she thought she would die from joy. Her real father was dead, gone with his boat, killed by an angry scylla after a storm had blown him far off course; her mother was gladly rid of her. She leapt at the new life, at the sky; it seemed that all her dreams were coming true. Woodwings had the right idea, she thought then. Dream anything hard enough, and it can be yours.

Her faith had left when Coll came, and she was told.

Coll. Everything came back to Coll.

So, lost, Maris brushed all thought aside, and watched in melancholy peace.

The day came, as Maris knew it must.

It was a small party, though the Landsman himself was the host. He was a portly, genial man, with a kind face hidden by a full beard that he hoped would make him fierce. When he met them at the door, his clothes dripped wealth: rich embroidered fabrics, rings of copper and brass, and a heavy necklace of real wrought iron. But the welcome was warm.

Inside the lodge was a great party room. Bare wooden beams above, torches flaming bright along the walls, a scarlet carpet underneath. And a table, groaning under its burden: *kivas* from the Shotans and Amberly's own wines, cheeses flown in from Culhall, fruit from the Outer Islands, great bowls of green salad. In the hearth, a seacat turned on a spit.

Their land-bound friends were all there, and they clustered around Coll, offering congratulations. Some of them even felt compelled to talk to Maris, to tell her how lucky she was to have a flyer for a brother, to have been a flyer herself. Have been, have been, have been. She wanted to scream.

But the flyers were worse. They were there in force, of course. Corm, handsome as ever, dripping charm, held court in one corner, telling stories of far-off places to starry-eyed land-bound girls. Shalli

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was dancing; before the evening had run its course she would burn out a half-dozen men with her frantic energy. Other flyers had come from other islands. Anni of Culhall, the boy Jamis the Younger, fast-aging Helmer whose own daughter would claim his wings in less than a year, a half-dozen others from the West, three cliquish Easterners. Her friends, her brothers, her comrades in the Eyrie.

But now they avoided her. Anni smiled politely and looked the other way. Jamis delivered his father's greetings, then lapsed into an uncomfortable silence, shifting from foot to foot until Maris let him go. His sigh of relief was almost audible. Even Corm, who said he was never nervous, seemed ill at ease with her. He brought her a cup of hot *kivas*, then saw a friend across the room that he simply *had* to talk to.

Feeling cut off and shunned, Maris found a leather chair by the window. There she sat and sipped her *kivas* and listened to the rising wind pull at the shutters. She didn't blame them. How can you talk to a wingless flyer?

She was glad that Garth and Dorrel had not come, nor any of the others she had come to love especially. And she was ashamed of being glad.

Then there was a stir by the door, and her mood lifted slightly. Barrion had arrived.

Maris smiled despite herself. Although Russ thought him a bad influence on Coll, she liked Barrion, tall and gray and serious, with his guitar sewn to his hand and his rumbly deep voice. He was Amberly's best singer, so it was said. At least Coll said it, and Barrion himself, of course. But then he also said that he'd been to a dozen islands, unthinkable for a wingless man. And he claimed that his guitar had arrived generations ago from Earth, with the star sailors themselves. His family had handed it down, he said, all serious, as if he expected Coll and Maris to believe him. But the idea was nonsense—treating a guitar as if it were a pair of wings.

Still, liar or no, lanky Barrion was entertaining enough, and romantic enough, and he sang like the very wind. Coll had studied under him, and now they were great friends.

The Landsman clapped him roundly on the back, and Barrion laughed, sat down, and prepared to sing. The room grew quiet; even Corm stopped in mid-story.

He began with the "Song of the Star Sailors."

It was the oldest ballad, the first of those that they could rightly call their own. Barrion sang it simply, with easy loving familiarity, and Maris softened to the sound of his deep voice. How often she used to hear Coll staying up late at night, plucking at his own instrument and

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singing the same song. His voice had been changing then; it made him furious. Every third stanza would be interrupted by a hideous cracked note and a minute of swearing. Maris used to lie in bed and giggle helplessly at the noises from down the hall.

Now she listened to the words, as Barrion sang sweetly of the star sailors and their great ship, with its silver sails that stretched a hundred miles to catch the wild starwinds. The whole story was there. The mysterious storm, the crippled ship, the coffins where they died a while; then, driven off course, they came *here*, to a world of endless ocean and raging storms, a world where the only land was a thousand scattered rocky islands, and the winds blew constantly. The song told of the landing, in a ship not meant to land, of the death of thousands in their coffins, and the way the sail—barely heavier than air—had floated atop the sea, turning the waters silver all around the Shotans. Barrion sang of the star sailors' magic, and their dream of repairing the ship, and the slow agonizing dying of that dream. He lingered melancholy over the fading powers of their magic machines, the fading that ended in darkness. Finally came the battle, just off Big Shotan, when the Old Captain and his loyalists went down defending the precious metal sails against their sons. Then, with the last magic, the sons of the star sailors, the first children of Windhaven, cut the sails into pieces, light, flexible, immensely strong. And, with whatever metal they could salvage from the ship, they forged the wings.

For the scattered people of Windhaven needed communication. Without fuel, without metal, faced by oceans full of storms and predators, given nothing free but the powerful winds: the choice was easy.

The last chords faded from the air. The poor sailors, Maris thought, as always. The Old Captain and his crew, they were flyers too, though their wings were starwings. But their way of flying had to die so a new way could be born.

Barrion grinned at someone's request, and began a new tune. He did a half-dozen songs from ancient Earth, then looked around sheepishly and offered up a composition of his own, a bawdy drinking song about a horny scylla who mistook a fishing ship for its mate. Maris hardly listened. Her mind was on the star sailors still. In a way, they were like Woodwings, she thought; they couldn't give up their dream. And it meant they had to die. I wonder if they thought it was worth it?

"Barrion," Russ called from the floor. "This is a flyer's age-day. Give us some flying songs!"

The singer grinned, and nodded. Maris looked over at Russ. He stood by the table, a wine glass in his good hand, a smile on his face.

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He is proud, she thought. His son is soon to be a flyer, and he has forgotten me. She felt sick and beaten.

Barrion sang flying songs: ballads from the Outer Islands, from Shotan, from Culhall and Amberly and Poweet. He sang of the ghost flyers, lost forever over the seas when they obeyed the Landsman-Captain and took swords into the sky. In still air you can see them yet, wandering hopelessly through the storms on phantom wings. Or so the legends go. But flyers who hit still air seldom return to talk of it, so no one could say for sure.

He did the song of white-haired Royn, who was past eighty when he found his flyer grandson dead in a lover's quarrel, and took the wings to chase and kill the culprit.

He did the ballad of Aron and Jeni, the saddest song of all. Jeni had been a land-born, and worse, crippled: unable to walk, she had lived with her mother, a washerwoman, and daily she sat by the window to watch the flyers' cliff on Little Shotan. There she fell in love with Aron, a graceful laughing flyer, and in her dreams he loved her too. But one day, alone in her house, she saw him play in the sky with another flyer, a fire-haired woman, and when they landed they kissed each other. When her mother came home, Jeni was dead. Aron, when they told him, would not let them bury the woman he had never known. He took her in his arms and carried her up to the cliff; then, slinging her beneath him, he rode the winds far out to sea and gave her a flyer's death.

Woodwings had a song too, though not a very good one; it made him a comical fool. Barrion sang it, though, and the one about the Flyer-Who-Brought-Bad-News, and Winddance, the flyers' wedding song, and a dozen others. Maris could hardly move, so caught was she. The *kivas* was rain cold in her hand, forgotten in the face of the words. It was a good feeling, a restless disturbing glorious sadness, and it brought back to her memories of the winds.

"Your brother is a flyer born," a soft voice whispered by her side, and she saw that Corm was resting on the arm of her chair. He gestured gracefully with his wine glass, to where Coll sat at Barrion's feet. The youth had his hands folded tightly around his knees, and his look was one of rapture.

"See how the songs touch him," Corm said, easily. "Only songs to a land-bound, but more, much more, to a flyer. You and I know that, Maris, and your brother too. I can tell by watching. I know how it must be for you, but think of him, girl. He loves it as much as you."

Maris looked up at him, and all but laughed at his wisdom. Yes, Coll looked entranced, and she knew why and he did not. It was singing he loved, not flying; the songs, not the subject. But how

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could Corm know that, smiling handsome Corm who was so sure of himself and knew so little. "Do you think that only flyers dream, Corm?" she asked him in a whisper, then quickly glanced away to where Barrion was finishing a song.

"There are more flying songs," Barrion said. "If I sang them all, we would be here all night, and I'd never get to eat." He looked at Coll. "Wait. You'll learn more than I'll ever know when you reach the Eyrie. I've only been to a dozen islands, your flyers have seen hundreds." Corm, by Maris' side, raised his glass in salute.

Coll stood up. "I want to do one."

Barrion smiled. "I think I can trust you with my guitar. Nobody else, maybe, but you, yes." He got up, relinquishing his seat to the quiet, pale-faced youth.

Coll sat down, strummed nervously, biting his lip. He blinked at the torches, looked over at Maris, blinked again. "I want to do a new song, about a flyer. I—well, I wrote it. I wasn't there, you understand, but I heard the story, and well, it's all true. It *ought* to be a song, and it hasn't been, till now."

"Well, sing it then, boy," the Landsman boomed.

Coll smiled, glanced at Maris again. "I call this 'Raven's Fall.'"

And he sang it.

Clear and pure, with a beautiful voice, just the way it happened. Maris watched him with wide eyes, listened with awe. He got it all right. He even caught the feeling, the lump that twisted in her when Raven's folded wings bloomed mirror-bright in the sun, and he climbed away from death. All of the school-girl love she had felt for him was in Coll's song; the Raven that he sang of was a glorious winged knight, dark and daring and defiant. As Maris once had thought.

He has a gift, Maris thought, and Corm looked down at her and said, "What?" and suddenly she realized that she'd whispered it aloud.

"Coll," she said, in a low voice. The last notes of the song rang in her ears. "He could be better than Barrion, if he had a chance. I told him that story, Corm. I was there, and a dozen others, when Raven did his trick. But none of us could have made it beautiful, as Coll did. He has a very special gift."

Corm smiled at her complacently. "True. Next year we'll wipe out Eastern in the singing competition."

And Maris looked at him, suddenly furious. It was all so wrong, she thought. Across the room, Coll was watching her, a question in his eyes. Maris nodded to him, and he grinned proudly. He had done it right.

And she had decided.

But then, before Coll could start another song, Russ came forward. "Now," he said, "now we must get serious. We've had singing and

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talk, good eating and good drink here in the warmth. But outside are the winds."

They all listened gravely, as was expected, and the sound of the winds, forgotten background for so long, now seemed to fill the room. Maris heard, and shivered.

"The wings," her father said. The Landsman came forward, holding them in his hands like the trust they were. He spoke his ritual words. "Long have these wings served Amberly, linking us to all the folk of Windhaven, for generations, back unto the the days of the star sailors. Marion flew them, daughter of a star sailor, and *her* daughter Jeri, and her son Jon, and Anni, and Flan, and Denis" . . . the genealogy went on a long time . . . "and last Russ and his daughter Maris." There was a slight ripple in the crowd: the Landsman had broken tradition slightly. Maris had not been a true flyer: she ought not to have been named. "And now young Coll will take them, and now, as other Landsmen have done for generations, I hold them for a brief while, to bring them luck with my touch. And through me all the folk of Lesser Amberly touch these wings, and with my voice they say, 'Fly well, Coll!' "

The Landsman handed the folded wings to Russ, and her father took them and turned to Coll. He was standing then, the guitar at his feet, and he looked very small and very pale. "It is time for someone to become a flyer," Russ said. "It is time for me to pass on the wings, and for Coll to accept them, and it would be folly to strap on wings in a house. Let us go to flyers' cliff and watch a boy become a man."

The torch-bearers, flyers all, were ready. They left the lodge, Coll in a place of honor between his father and the Landsman, the flyers close behind with the torches. Maris and the rest of the party followed further back.

It was a ten-minute walk, slow step in other-worldly silence, before they stood in a rough semi-circle on the stage of the cliff. Alone by the edge, Russ, one-handed and disdaining help, strapped the wings onto his son. Coll's face was chalk white. He stood very still indeed while Russ unfolded the wings, and looked straight down at the abyss before him, where dark waves clawed against the beach.

Finally, it was done. "My son, you are a flyer," Russ said, and then he stepped back with the rest of them, close to Maris. Coll stood alone beneath the stars, perched on the brink, his immense silvery wings making him look smaller than ever before. Maris wanted to shout, to interrupt, to do something; she could feel the tears on her cheek. But she could not move. Like all the rest, she waited for the traditional first flight.

And Coll at last, with a sharp in-

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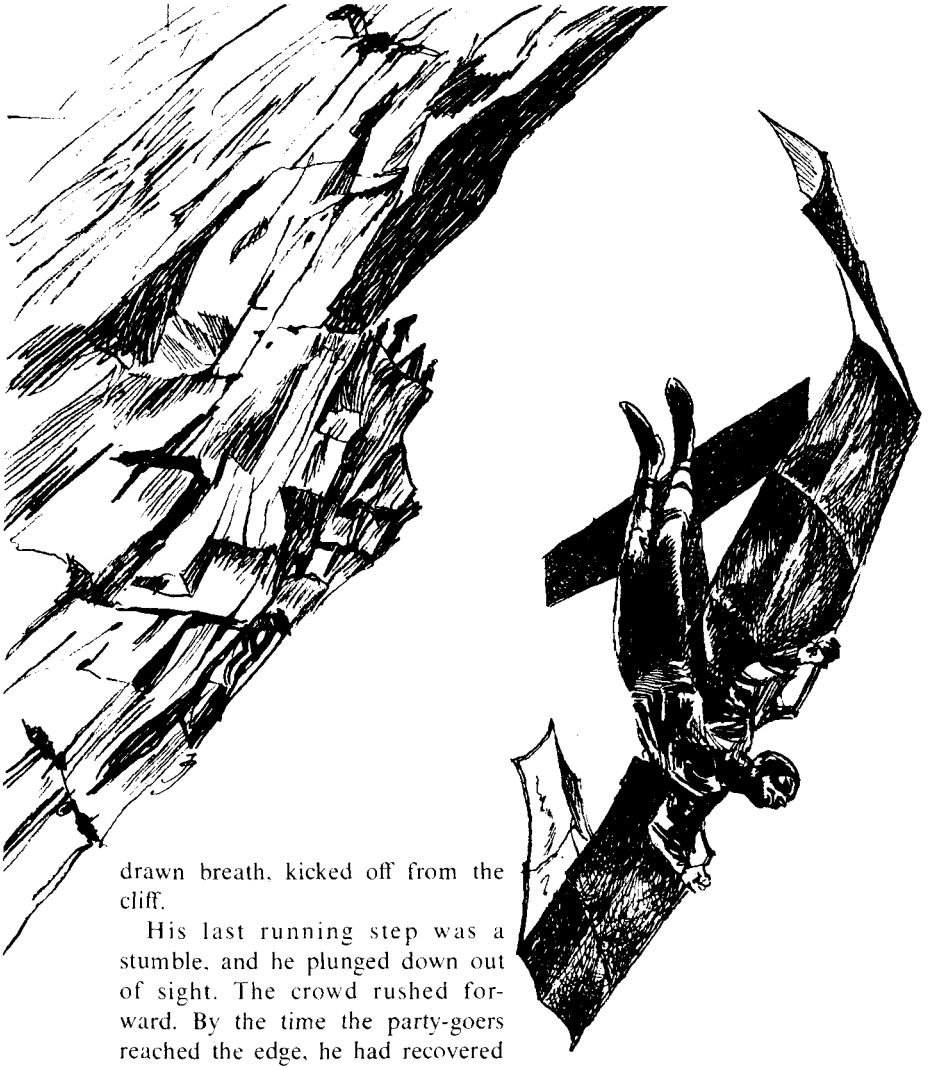

drawn breath, kicked off from the cliff.

His last running step was a stumble, and he plunged down out of sight. The crowd rushed forward. By the time the party-goers reached the edge, he had recovered and was climbing slowly up. He made a wide circle out over the ocean, then glided in close to the cliff, then back out again. Sometimes young flyers gave their friends a show, but Coll was no showman. A winged silver wraith, he wandered awkward and a little lost in a sky that was not his home.

Other wings were being broken out; Corm and Shalli and the others prepared to fly. Shortly now they would join Coll in the sky, make a few passes in formation, then leave the land-bound behind and fly off to the Eyrie to spend the rest of the night in celebration of their newest member.

Before any of them could leap, though, the wind changed; Maris

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felt it with a flyer's perception. And she heard it, a gale of cold that screeched forlorn over the rocky edges of the peak, and most of all she saw it, for out above the waves Coll faltered visibly. He dipped slightly, fought to save himself, went into a sudden spin. Someone gasped. Then, quickly again, he was back in control, and headed back to them. But struggling, struggling. It was a rough wind, angry, pushing him down; the sort of wind a flyer had to coax and sooth and tame. Coll wrestled with it, and it was beating him.

"He's in trouble," Corm said, and the handsome flyer flung out his last wing struts with a snap. "I'll fly guard." With that, he was suddenly aloft.

Too late to be of much help, though. Coll, his wings swaying back and forth as he was buffeted by the sudden turbulence, was headed toward the landing beach. A wordless decision was made, and the party moved as one to meet him, Maris and her father in the lead.

Coll came down fast, too fast. He was not riding the wind, no, he was being pushed. His wings shook as he dropped, and he tilted, so one wingtip brushed the ground while the other pointed up toward the sky. Wrong, wrong, all wrong. Even as they rushed onto the beach, there was a great spraying shower of dry sand and then the sudden horrible sound of metal snapping and Coll was down, lying safe in the sand.

But his left wing was limp and broken.

Russ reached him first, knelt over him, started to work on the straps. The others gathered around. Then Coll rose a little, and they saw that he was shaking, and his eyes were full of tears.

"Don't worry," Russ said, in a mock-hearty voice. "It was only a strut, son, they break all the time. We'll fix it easy. You were a little shaky, but all of us are the first time up. Next time will be better."

"Next time, next time, next time!" Coll said. "I can't do it, I can't do it, Father. I don't *want* a next time! I don't *want* your wings!" He was crying openly now, and his body shook with his sobs.

The guests stood in mute shock, and his father's face grew stern. "You are my son, and a flyer. There will be a next time. And you will learn."

Coll continued to shake and sob, the wings off now, lying unstrapped at his feet, broken and useless at least for now. There would be no flight to the Eyrie tonight.

The father reached out his good arm and took his son by the shoulder, shaking him. "You hear? You

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hear? I won't listen to such nonsense. You fly, or you are no son of mine."

Coll's sudden defiance was all gone now. He nodded, biting back the tears, looked up. "Yes, Father," he said. "I'm sorry. I just got scared out there, I didn't mean to say it." He was only thirteen, Maris remembered as she watched from among the guests. Thirteen and scared and not at all a flyer. "I don't know why I said it. I didn't mean it, really."

And Maris found her voice. "Yes, you did," she said loudly, remembering the way Coll had sung of Raven, remembering the decision she had made. The others turned to look at her with shock, and Shalli put a restraining hand on her arm. But Maris shrugged it off and pushed forward to stand between Coll and his father.

"He did mean it," she said quietly, her voice steady and sure while her heart trembled. "Couldn't you see, Father? He's not a flyer. He's a good son, and you should be proud of him, but he will never love the wind. I don't care what the law says."

"Maris," Russ said, and there was nothing warm in his voice, only despair and hurt. "You would take the wings from your own brother? I thought you loved him."

A week ago she would have cried, but now her tears were all used up. "I do love him, and I want him to have a long and happy life. He will not be happy as a flyer; he does it just to make *you* proud. Coll is a singer, a good one. Why must you take from him the life he loves?"

"I take nothing," Russ said coldly. "Tradition . . ."

"A stupid tradition," a new voice interjected. Maris looked for her ally, and saw Barrion pushing through the crowd. "Maris is right. Coll sings like an angel, and we all saw how he flies." He glanced around contemptuously at the flyers in the crowd. "You flyers are such creatures of habit that you have forgotten how to think. You follow tradition blindly no matter who is hurt."

Almost unnoticed, Corm had landed and folded up his wings. Now he stood before them, his smooth dark face flushed with anger. "The flyers and their traditions have made Amberly great, have shaped the very history of Windhaven a thousand times over. I don't care how well you sing, Barrion, you are not beyond the law." He looked at Russ, and continued. "Don't worry, friend. We'll make your son a flyer such as Amberly has never seen."

But then Coll looked up, and though the tears flowed still, suddenly there was anger in his face too, and decision. "*No!*" he shouted, and his glance at Corm was defiant. "You won't make me anything I don't want to be, I don't care who you are. I'm not a cow-

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ard, I'm not a baby, but I don't want to fly, I don't, *I DON'T!*" His words were a torrent, all but screamed into the wind, as his secret came pouring out and all the barriers fell at once. "You flyers think you're so good, that everybody else is beneath you, but you're not, you know, you're not. Barrion has been to a dozen islands, and he knows more songs than a dozen flyers, I don't care what you think, Corm. He's not land-bound, he takes ships when everybody else is too scared. You flyers stay clear of scyllas, but Barrion killed one once with a harpoon, from a little wooden boat. I bet you didn't know that.

"I can be like him, too. I have a talent. He's going to the Outer Islands, and he wants me to come with him, and he told me once that he'd give me his guitar one day. He can take flying and make it beautiful with his words, but he can do the same thing with fishing or hunting or *anything*. Flyers can't do that, but he can. He's *Barrion!* He's a *singer*, and that's just as good as being a flyer. And I can do it too, like I did tonight with Raven." He glared at Corm with hate. "Take your old wings, give them to Maris, she's the flyer," he shouted, kicking at the limp fabric on the ground. "I want to go with Barrion."

There was an awful silence. Russ stood mute for a long time, then looked at his son with a face that was older than it had ever been. "They are not his wings to take, Coll," he said. "They were my wings, and my father's, and his mother's before him, and I wanted—I wanted—" His voice broke.

"You are responsible for this," Corm said angrily, with a glance at Barrion. "And you, yes *you*, his own sister," he added, shifting his gaze to Maris.

"All right, Corm," she said. "We are responsible, Barrion and I, because we love Coll and we want to see him happy—and alive. The flyers have followed tradition too long. Barrion is right, don't you see? Every year bad flyers take the wings of their fathers and die with them, and Windhaven is poorer, for wings cannot be replaced. How many flyers were there in the days of the star sailors? How many are there today? Can't you see what tradition is doing to us? The wings are a trust; they should be worn by those who love the sky, who will fly best and keep them best. Instead, birth is our only measure for awarding wings. Birth, not skill, but a flyer's skill is all that saves him from death, all that binds Windhaven together."

Corm snorted. "This is a disgrace. You are no flyer, Maris, and you have no right to speak of these matters. Your words disgrace the sky and you violate all tradition. If your brother chooses to give up his birthright, very well, then. But he

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won't make a mockery of our law and give them to anyone, he chooses." He looked around, at the shock-still crowd. "Where is the Landsman? Tell us the law!"

The Landsman's voice was slow, troubled. "The law—the tradition—but this case is so special, Corm. Maris has served Amberly well, and we all know how she flies. I—"

"The *law*," Corm insisted.

The Landsman shook his head. "Yes, that is my duty, but—the law says that—that if a flyer renounces his wings then they shall be taken by another flyer from the island, the senior, and he and the Landsman shall hold them until a new wing-bearer is chosen. But Corm, no flyer has ever renounced his wings—the law is only used when a flyer dies without an heir, and here, in this case, Maris is—"

"The law is the law," Corm said.

"And you will follow it blindly," Barrion put in.

Corm ignored him. "I am Amberly's senior flyer, since Russ has passed on the wings. I will take custody, until we find someone worthy of being a flyer, someone who will recognize the honor and keep the traditions."

"*No!*" Coll shouted. "I want *Maris* to have the wings."

"You have no say in the matter," Corm told him. "You are a landbound." So saying, he stooped and picked up the discarded, broken wings. Methodically he began to fold them.

Maris looked around for help, but it was hopeless. Barrion spread his hands, Shalli and Helmer would not meet her gaze, and her father stood broken and weeping, a flyer no more, not even in name, only an old cripple. The partygoers, one by one, began to drift away.

The Landsman came to her. "Maris," he started. "I am sorry, I would give the wings to you if I could. The law is not meant for this—not as punishment, but only as a guide. But it's flyers' law, and I cannot go against the flyers. If I deny Corm, Amberly will become like Kennehut and the songs will call me mad."

She nodded. "I understand," she said. Corm, wings under either arm, was stalking off the beach.

The Landsman turned and left, and Maris went across the sand to Russ. "Father-" she began.

He looked up. "You are no daughter of mine," he said, and turned away from her deliberately. She watched the old man moving stiffly away, walking with difficulty, going inland to hide his shame.

Finally the three of them stood alone on the landing beach, wordless and beaten. Maris went to Coll and put her arms around him and hugged him. They held on to each other, both for the moment children seeking comfort they could not give.

"I have a place," Barrion said at last, his voice waking them. They

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parted groggily, watched as the singer slung his guitar across his shoulders, and followed him home.

For Maris, the days that followed were dark and troubled.

Barrion lived in a small cabin by the harbor, just off a deserted, rotting wharf, and it was there they stayed. Coll was happier than Maris had ever seen him; each day he sang with Barrion, and he knew that he would be a singer after all. Only the fact that Russ refused to see him bothered the boy, and even that was often forgotten. He was young, and he had discovered that many his own age looked on him with guilty admiration, like a rebel, and he gloried in the feeling.

But for Maris, things were not as easy. She seldom left the cabin, except to wander out on the wharf at sunset and watch the fishing boats come in. She could think only of her loss. She was trapped and helpless. She had tried as hard as she could, she had done the right thing, but still her wings were gone. Tradition, like a mad cruel Landsman, had ruled, and now kept her prisoner.

Two weeks after the incident on the beach, Barrion returned to the cabin after a day on the docks, where he went daily to gather new songs from the fishermen of Amberly and sing at wharfside inns. As they ate bowls of hot, meaty stew, he looked at Maris and the boy and said, "I have arranged for a boat. In a month I will sail for the Outer Islands."

Coll smiled eagerly. "Us too?"

Barrion nodded. "You, yes, certainly. And Maris?"

She shook her head. "No."

The singer sighed. "You can gain nothing by staying here. Things will be hard for you on Amberly. Even for me, times are getting difficult. The Landsman moves against me, prompted by Corm, and respectable folk are starting to avoid me. Besides, there is a lot of world to see. Come with us." He smiled. "Maybe I can even teach *you* how to sing."

Maris played idly with her stew. "I sing worse than my brother flies, Barrion. No, I can't go. I'm a flyer. I must stay, and win my wings again."

"I admire you, Maris," he said, "but your fight is hopeless. What can you do?"

"I don't know. Something. The Landsman, perhaps. I can go to him. The Landsman makes the law, and he sympathizes. If he sees that it is best for the people of Amberly, then . . ."

"He can't defy Corm. Besides, this is a matter of flyers' law, and he has no control over that. Besides . . ." he hesitated.

"What?"

"There is news. It's all over the docks. They've found a new flyer, or an old one, actually. Devin of Gavora is en route here by boat to take up residence and wear your

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wings." He watched her carefully, concern written across his face.

"Devin!" She slammed down her fork, and stood. "Have their laws blinded them to common sense?" She paced back and forth across the room. "Devin is a worse flyer than Coll ever was. He lost his own wings when he swooped too low and grazed water. If it hadn't been for a ship passing by, he would be dead. So Corm wants to give him another pair?"

Barrion grinned bitterly. "He's a flyer, and he keeps the old traditions."

"How long ago did he leave?"

"A few days, the word says."

"It's a two-week voyage, easily," Maris said. "If I'm going to act, it must be before he gets here. Once he has worn the wings, they'll be his, and lost to me."

"But Maris," Coll said, "what can you do?"

"Nothing," Barrion said. "Oh, we could steal the wings, of course. Corm has had them repaired, good as new. But where would you go? You'd never find a welcome. Give it up, girl. You can't change flyers' law."

"No?" she said. Suddenly her voice was animated. She stopped pacing and leaned against the table. "Are you sure? Have the traditions *never* been changed? Where did they come from?"

Barrion looked puzzled. "Well, there was the council, just after the Old Captain was killed, when the Landsman-Captain of Big Shotan passed out the new-forged wings. That was when it was decided that no flyer would ever bear a weapon in the sky. They remembered the battle, and the way the old star sailors used the last two sky sleds to rain fire from above."

"Yes," said Maris, "and remember, there were two other councils as well. Generations after that, when another Landsman-Captain wanted to bend the other Landsmen to his will and bring all of Windhaven under his control, he sent the flyers of Big Shotan into the sky with swords to strike at Little Shotan. And the flyers of the other islands met in council and condemned him, after his ghost flyers had vanished. So he was the last Landsman-Captain, and now Big Shotan is just another island."

"Yes," Coll said, "and the third council was when all the flyers voted not to land on Kennehut, after the Mad Landsman killed the Flyer-Who-Brought-Bad News."

Barrion was nodding. "All right. But no council has been called since then. Are you sure they would assemble?"

"Of course," said Maris. "It is an unwritten law, one of Corm's precious traditions. Any flyer can call a council. And I could present my case there, to all the flyers of Windhaven, and . . ."

She stopped. Barrion looked at her and she looked back, the same thought on both minds.

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"Any flyer," he said, the emphasis unvoiced.

"But I am not a flyer," Maris said. She slumped into her chair. "And Coll has renounced his wings, and Russ—even if he would see us—has passed them on. Corm would not honor our request. The word would not go out."

"You could ask Shalli," Coll suggested. "Or wait up on flyers' cliff, or . . ."

"Shalli is too much junior to Corm, and too frightened," Barrion said. "I hear the stories. She's sad for you, like the Landsman, but she won't break tradition. Corm might try to take her wings as well. And the others—who could you count on? And how long could you wait? Helmer visits most often, but he's as hidebound as Corm. Jamis is too young, and so on. You'd be asking them to take quite a risk." He shook his head doubtfully. "It will not work. No flyer will speak for you, not in time. In two weeks Devin will wear your wings."

All three of them were silent. Maris stared down at her plate of cold stew, and thought. No way, she asked, is there really no way? Then she looked at Barrion. "Earlier," she began, very carefully, "you mentioned something about stealing the wings . . ."

The wind was cold and wet, angry, lashing at the waves; against the eastern sky a storm was building. "Good flying weather," Maris said. The boat rocked gently beneath her.

Barrion smiled, pulled his cloak a little tighter to shut out the damp. "Now if only you could do some flying," he said.

Her eyes went to the shore, where Corm's dark wood house stood against the trees. A light was on in an upper window. Three days, Maris thought sourly. He should have been called by now. How long could they afford to wait? Each hour brought Devin closer, the man who would take her wings.

"Tonight?" she asked Barrion.

He shrugged. He was cleaning his nails with a long dagger, intent on the task. "You would know better than I," he said without looking up. "The light tower is still dark. How often are flyers called?"

"Often," Maris said, thoughtful. But would Corm be called? They had already floated offshore two nights, hoping for a summons that would call him away from the wings. Perhaps the Landsman was using only Shalli until such time as Devin arrived. "I don't like it," she said. "We have to do something."

Barrion slid his dagger into its sheath. "I could use that on Corm, but I won't. I'm with you, Maris, and your brother is all but a son to me, but I'm not going to kill for a pair of wings. No. We wait until the light tower calls to Corm, then break in. Anything else is too chancy."

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Kill, Maris thought. Would it come to that, if they forced their way in while Corm was still at home? And then she knew it would. Corm was Corm, and he *would* resist. She'd been inside his home once. She remembered the set of crossed obsidian knives that gleamed upon his wall. There must be another way.

"The Landsman isn't going to call him," she said. She knew it, somehow. "Not unless there's an emergency."

Barrion studied the clouds building up in the east. "So?" he said. "We can hardly make an emergency."

"But we can make a signal," Maris said.

"Hmmmm," the singer replied. He considered the idea. "Yes, we could, I suppose." He grinned at her. "Maris, we break more laws every day. It's bad enough we're going to steal your wings, but now you want me to force my way into the light tower and send a phoney call. It's a good thing I'm a singer, or we'd go down as the greatest criminals in the history of Amberly."

"How does your being a singer prevent that?"

"Who do you think writes the songs? I'd rather make us all into heroes."

They traded smiles.

Barrion took the oars and rowed them quickly into shore, to a marshy beach hidden by the trees but not far from Corm's home. "Wait here," he said, as he climbed out into the knee-deep, lapping water. "I'll go to the tower. Go in and get the wings as soon as you see Corm leave." Maris nodded her agreement.

For nearly an hour she sat alone in the gathering darkness, watching lightning flash far off to the east. Soon the storm would be on them; already she could feel the bite of the wind. Finally, up on the highest hill of Amberly, the great beacon of the Landsman's light tower began to blink in a staccato rhythm. Barrion knew the correct signal somehow, Maris suddenly realized, even though she'd forgot to tell him. The singer knew a lot, more than she'd ever given him credit for. Perhaps he wasn't such a liar after all.

Short minutes later, she was lying in the weeds a few feet from Corm's door, head low, sheltered by the shadows and the trees. The door opened, and the dark-haired flyer came out, his wings slung over his back. He was dressed warmly. Flying clothes, thought Maris. He hurried down the main road.

After he was gone, it was a simple task to find a rock, sneak around to the side of the building, and smash in a window. Luckily, Corm was unmarried, and he lived alone; that is, if he didn't have a woman with him tonight. But they'd been watching the house

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carefully, and no one had come and gone except a cleaning woman who worked during the day.

Maris brushed away loose glass, then vaulted up onto the sill and into the house. All darkness inside, but her eyes adjusted quickly. She had to find the wings, *her* wings, before Corm returned. He'd get to the light tower soon enough and find it was a false alarm. Barrion wasn't going to hang around to be caught.

The search was short. Just inside the front door, on the rack where he hung his own wings between flights, she found hers. She took them down carefully, with love and longing, and ran her hands over the cool metal to check the struts. At last, she thought. And then, they will never take them from me again.

She strapped them on, and ran. Through the door and into the woods, a different road than the one that Corm had taken. He would be home soon, to discover the loss. She had to get to flyers' cliff.

It took her a good half-hour, and twice she had to hide in the underbrush on the side of the road to avoid meeting another nighttime traveler. And even when she reached the cliff, there were people nearby, two men from the flyers' lodge down on the landing beach, so Maris had to hide behind some rocks, and wait, and watch their lanterns.

She was stiff from crouching and shivering from the cold when, far over the sea, she spied another pair of silvered wings, coming down fast. The flyer circled once low above the beach, jerking the lodge men to attention, then came in smoothly for a landing. As they unstrapped her, Maris saw it was Anni of Culhall, with a message, no doubt. Her chance was here, then. The lodge men would escort Anni to the Landsman.

When they had gone off with her, Maris scrambled to her feet, and quickly moved up the rocky path to flyers' cliff. It was a cumbersome, slow task to unfold her own wings, but she did it, though the hinges on the left wing were stiff and she had to snap it five times before the final stut flung out. Corm didn't even take care of them, she thought bitterly.

Then, forgetting that, forgetting everything, she ran and jumped into the winds.

The gathering gale hit her almost like a fist, but she rolled with the punch, shifting and twisting until she caught a strong updraft and began to climb, quickly now, higher and higher. Close at hand, lightning flashed behind her, and she felt a brief tremor of fear. But then it was still. Again, she was flying, and if she was burned from the sky, well, no one would mourn her on Amberly save Coll, and there could be no finer death. She banked and climbed still higher,

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and despite herself she let out a laughing whoop of joy.

And a voice answered her. "Turn!" it said, shouting, hot with anger. Startled, losing the feel for an instant, she looked up and behind.

Lightning slashed the sky over Amberly again, and in its light the night-shadowed wings above her gleamed noonday-silver. From out of the clouds, Corm was coming down on her fast.

He was shouting as he came. "I knew it was you," he said. But the wind blew every third word away from her. ". . . had to . . . behind it . . . never went home . . . cliff . . . waited. *Turn!* I'll force you down! Land-bound!" That last she heard, and she laughed at him.

"Try, then," she yelled at him, defiantly. "Show me what a flyer you are, Corm! Catch me if you can!" And then, still laughing, she tilted a wing and veered out from under his dive, and he kept on down as she rose, still shouting as he passed her.

A thousand times she'd played with Dorrel, chasing one another around the Eyrie, tag games in the sky, but now, this time, the chase was deadly earnest. Maris toyed with the winds, looking only for speed and altitude, and instinctively she found the currents and rose higher and faster. Far below now, Corm checked his fall, tilted up, banked and came at her from below. But by the time he reached her height, she was far ahead. She intended to stay that way. This was no game, and she could afford no risks. If he got above her, he was angry enough to begin forcing her down, inch by inch, until he pressed her right into the ocean. He would regret it afterwards, grieve for the lost wings, but Maris knew that he would do it nonetheless. The traditions of the flyers meant that much to him. Idly, she wondered, how would she have acted, a year ago, toward a man who stole a set of wings?

Now Amberly was lost behind them, and the only land in sight was the flashing light tower of Culhall off to the right and low on the horizon. And that too was soon gone, and there was nothing but black sea below and sky above. And Corm, relentless, still behind her, outlined against the storm. But—Maris looked back and blinked—he seemed smaller. Was she gaining on him? Corm was a skilled flyer, that much she was sure of. He had always performed well for Western in the competitions, while she was not allowed to compete. And yet, now, clearly, the gap was widening.

Lightning flashed once more, and thunder rolled ominous across the sea a few seconds later. From below a scylla roared back at the storm, hearing in the boom an angry challenge. But for Maris, it meant something else indeed. The timing, the timing; the storm was

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growing more distant. She was heading northwest, the storm due west perhaps; at any rate, she was angling out from beneath it.

Something soared inside her. She banked and flipped just for the joy of it, did a showman's loop from sheer exultation, jumping from current to current like an acrobat of the sky. The winds were hers now; nothing could go wrong.

Corm closed in while Maris was playing, and when she came out of her loop and began to climb again, she saw him close at hand and dimly heard his shouts. He was yelling something about her not being able to land, about her being an outcast with her stolen wings. Poor Corm! What did he know?

Maris dove, until she could all but taste the salt, until she could hear the waters rolling a few feet below. If he would kill her, if he would force her into the waves, well, she had made herself vulnerable now, as vulnerable as she could be. She was skimming; all he had to do was catch up, get above her, swoop.

She knew, she *knew,* he could not do it, no matter how much he might like to. By the time she flew out from under the churning cloud cover, into a clear night sky where the stars winked on her wings, Corm was only a tiny dot behind her, dwindling fast. Maris waited until she could see his wings no longer, then caught a new upwind and changed course to the south, knowing that Corm would continue blindly ahead until he gave up and circled back to Amberly.

She was alone with her wings and the sky, and briefly, there was peace.

Hours later, the first lights of Laus burned at her through the dark; flaming beacons set atop the rocky island's Old Fortress. Maris angled toward them, and soon the half-ruined bulk of the ancient castle sat before her, dead but for its lights.

She flew straight over it, across the breadth of the small mountainous island, to the landing strip on the sandy southwest spur. Laus was not populous enough to maintain a flyers' lodge, and for once Maris was thankful of that. There would be no lodge men to greet her or ask her questions. She landed alone and unnoticed in a shower of dry sand, and struggled out of her wings.

At the end of the landing strip, up against the base of flyers' cliff, Dorrel's simple cabin was dark and empty. When he did not answer her knock, Maris opened the unlatched door and entered, calling his name. But the house was silent. She felt a rush of disappointment that quickly changed to nervousness. Where was he? How long would he be gone? What if Corm figured out where she had come and trapped her here, before Dorrel's return?

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She set a rush against the banked and dimply glowing coals in the hearth and lit a sand-candle. Then she looked around the small, neat cabin, seeking some clue as to where and how long Dorrel had been gone.

There: tidy Dorrel had left some crumbs of fish cake on his otherwise clean table. She glanced toward a far corner and, yes, the house was truly empty, Anitra gone from her perch. So that was it; Dorrel was out hunting with his nighthawk.

Hoping they had not gone far, Maris took to the air again in search. She found him resting on a rock in the treacherous shallows of far western Laus, his wings strapped on but folded, Anitra perched on his wrist enjoying a piece of the fish she had just caught. Dorrel was talking to the bird and did not see Maris until she swept above him, her wings eclipsing the stars.

Then he stared at her while she circled and dipped dangerously low, and for a moment there was no recognition at all on his blank face.

"Dorrel," she shouted, tension sharpening her voice.

"Maris?" Incredulity broke across his face.

She turned and caught an updraft. "Come onto shore. I have to talk to you."

Dorrel, nodding, stood suddenly and shook the nighthawk free. The bird surrendered her fish reluctantly and climbed into the sky on pale white wings, circling effortlessly and waiting for her master. Maris swung around in the direction she had come.

This time, when she came down in the landing strip, her descent was sudden and clumsy, and she scraped her knees badly. Maris was confused, in turmoil; the tension of the theft, the strain of the long flight after that stretch of days without the sky, the strange mixture of pain and fear and joy the sight of Dorrel had suddenly, unexpectedly given her—it all overwhelmed her, shook her, and she didn't know what to do. Before Dorrel could join her she set to work unstrapping her wings, forcing her mind through the motions with her hands. She wouldn't think yet, she wouldn't let herself think. Blood from her knees trickled maddeningly down her legs.

Dorrel landed beside her, neatly and smoothly. He was shaken by her sudden appearance, but he didn't let his emotions interfere with his flying. It was more than a matter of pride with him: it was almost bred into him, as much an inheritance as his wings were. Anitra found his shoulder as he unstrapped.

He moved toward her and put his arms out. The night hawk made a bad-tempered noise, but he would still have embraced Maris, regardless of the bird, had she not

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suddenly thrust her wings into his outstretched hands.

"Here," Maris said. "I'm turning myself in. I stole these wings from Corm, and I'm giving them and myself over to you. I've come to ask you to call a council for me, because you're a flyer and I'm not, and only a flyer can call one."

Dorrel stared at her, confused as someone awakened suddenly out of a heavy sleep. Maris felt impatient with him, and overwhelmingly tired. "Oh, I'll explain," she said. "Let's go home so I can rest."

It was a long walk, but they went most of it in silence and without touching. Only once he said, "Maris—did you really *steal*—"

She cut him off. "Yes. I did." Then she suddenly sighed and moved as if to touch him, but stopped herself. "Forgive me, Dorrel, I didn't mean . . . I'm exhausted, and I suppose I'm frightened. I never thought I'd be seeing you again under such circumstances." Then she fell quiet again and he did not press her, and only Anitra broke the night with her grumbles and mutters at having her fishing ended so soon.

Once home, Maris sank into the one large chair, trying to force herself into relaxation, to make the tensions drain. She watched Dorrel and felt herself grow calmer as he went through his familiar rituals. He put Anitra on her perch and drew the curtains that hung around her (other folks might hood their birds to keep them quiet, but he disapproved of that), built up a fire, and hung a kettle to boil.

"Tea?"

"Yes."

"I'll put kerri blossoms in, instead of honey," he said. "That should relax you."

She felt a sudden flooding of warmth for him. "Thanks."

"Do you want to get out of those clothes? You can slip on my robe."

She shook her head—it would be too much effort to move now—and then she saw that he was gazing at her legs, bare below the short kilt she wore, and frowning with concern.

"You've hurt yourself." He poured warm water from the kettle into a dish, took a rag and some salve and knelt before her. The damp cloth cleaning away the dried blood was gentle as a soft tongue. "Ah, it's not as bad as it looked," he murmured as he worked. "Just your knees—just shallow scrapes. A clumsy landing, dear."

His nearness and his soft touch stirred her, and all tension, fear, and weariness were suddenly gone. One of his hands moved to her thigh and lingered there.

"Dorr," she said softly, almost too transfixed by the moment to speak, and he raised his head and their eyes met, and finally she had come back to him.

"It will work," Dorrel said. "They'll have to see. They can't

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deny you." They were sitting at breakfast. While Dorrel made eggs and tea, Maris had explained her plan in detail.

Now she smiled and spooned out more of the soft egg. She felt happy and full of hope. "Who'll go first to call council?"

"Garth. I thought," Dorrel said eagerly. "I'll catch him at home and we'll divide up the nearby islands and branch out. Others will want to help—I just wish you could come, too," he said, and his eyes grew wistful. "It would be nice, flying together again."

"We'll have lots of that, Dorr. *If*—"

"Yes, yes, we'll have lots of time to fly together, but—it would be nice this morning, especially."

"Yes. It'd be nice." She went on smiling and finally he had to smile too. He was just reaching across the table to take her hand, or touch her face, when a sudden knock at the door, loud and authoritative, made them freeze.

Dorrel rose to answer it. Maris in her chair was in full view of the doorway, but there was no point in trying to hide, and there was no second door.

Helmer stood outside, folded wings strapped to his back. He looked straight at Dorrel, but not past him into the cabin at Maris. "Corm has invoked the flyer's right to call a council," he said, his voice flat and strained and overly formal. "To concern the once-flyer Maris of Lesser Amberly who stole the wings of another. Your presence is requested."

"*What?*" Maris stood quickly. "Helmer—*Corm* has called a council? Why?"

Dorrel tossed a glance over his shoulder at her, then looked at Helmer, who was plainly if uncomfortably ignoring Maris.

"Why, Helmer?" he asked, more quietly than Maris had.

"I've told you. And I don't have time to stand here moving the wind with my mouth. I have other flyers to inform, and it's a thick day for flying."

"Wait for me," Dorrel said. "Give me some names, some islands to go to. It will make your task easier."

The corner of Helmer's mouth twitched. "I wouldn't've thought you'd want to go on such a mission, for such a reason. I hadn't intended to ask for your help. But since you offer . . ."

Helmer gave Dorrel terse instructions while the younger flyer rapidly winged himself. Maris paced, feeling restless, awkward, and confused again. Helmer was obviously determined to ignore her, and to save them both embarrassment Maris did not question him again.

Dorrel kissed her and squeezed her tightly before he left. "Feed Anitra for me, and try not to worry. I'll be back before it's been dark too long, I hope."

When the flyers were gone, the

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house felt stifling. Outside was not much better, Maris discovered as she stood against the door. Helmer had been right, it was not a good day for flying. It was a day to make one think of still air. She shuddered, fearing for Dorrel. But he was too skilled and too smart to need her worry, she thought, trying to reassure herself. And she would go crazy if she sat inside all day imagining possible dangers for him. It was frustrating enough to have to wait here, denied the sky—she looked up at the cloudy-bright overcast. If, after the council, she should be made a land-bound forever—

But there was plenty of time for sorrow in the future, so she resolved not to think about it now. She went back inside the house.

Anitra, a nocturnal flyer, was asleep behind her curtain; the cabin was still and very empty. She wished briefly for Dorrel, to ease her thoughts by sharing them, to speculate with her on why Corm had called the council. Alone, her thoughts went around and around in her head, birds in a trap.

A geechi game sat on top of Dorrel's wardrobe. Maris took it down, and arranged the smooth black and white pebbles in a simple opening pattern, one her mind was comfortable with. Idly she began to move them, playing both sides, shoving the pebbles unthinkingly into new configurations, each suggested by the last, each as inevitable as chance. And she thought: Corm is a proud man; I injured his pride. He is known as a good flyer and I, a fisherman's daughter, stole his wings and outflew him when he pursued me. Now, to regain his pride, he must humble me in some very public, very grand way. Getting the wings back would not be enough for him. No, everyone, every flyer, must be present to see me humbled and declared an outlaw.

Maris sighed. That was it. This was the council to outlaw the land-bound flyer who stole wings—oh, yes, songs would be written about it. But perhaps it made no difference. Even though Corm had stolen a flight on her, the council could still be turned against him. She, the accused, would have the right to speak, to defend herself, to attack senseless tradition. And her chance was the same, Maris knew, the same in Corm's council as it would have been in the one that Dorrel would have summoned. Only now she knew the full extent of Corm's hurt and his anger.

She looked down at the geechi board. The pebbles, white and black, were arrayed across the center of the board, facing each other. Both armies had committed themselves to attacking formations: it was clear that this would be no waiting game. With her next move, the captures would begin.

Maris smiled, and swept the pebbles from the table.

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It took a full month for the council to assemble.

Dorrel brought the call to four flyers that first day, and five others the next, and each of those contacted others, and those still others; and so the word went out in ever-widening ripples across the seas of Windhaven. A special flyer was sent off to the Outer Islands, another to desolate Artellia, the great frozen island to the north. Soon, all had heard, and one by one they flew to the meeting.

The site was Greater Amberly. By rights, the council should have been held on Lesser Amberly, home to both Maris and Corm. But the smaller island had no building large enough for such a gathering as this would be, and Greater Amberly did; a huge, dank hall, seldom used.

To it came the flyers of Windhaven. Not all of them, no, for there were always emergencies, and a few still had not received the word, and others were missing on long, dangerous flights; but most of them, the vast majority, and that was enough. In no one's lifetime had there ever been such a gathering. Even the annual competitions at the Eyrie were small compared to this, mere local contests between Eastern and Western. Or so it seemed to Maris then, during the month she waited and watched while the streets of Ambertown filled with laughing flyers.

There was an air of holiday about it all. The early arrivals held drinking bouts each night, to the delight of the local wine merchants, and traded stories and songs, and gossiped endlessly about the council and its outcome. Barrion and other singers kept them entertained by night, while by day they raced and frolicked in the air. The latecomers were greeted riotously as they straggled in. Maris, who had flown back from Laus after getting special leave to use the wings once more, ached to join them. Her friends were all there, and Corm's, and indeed all the wings of Western. The Easterners had come too, many in suits of fur and metal that reminded her irresistibly of the way Raven had dressed on that day so long ago. There were three pale-skinned Artellians, each wearing a silver circlet on his brow; aristocrats from a dark frigid land where flyers were kings as well as messengers. They mingled, brothers and equals, with the red-uniformed flyers of Big Shotan, and the twenty tall representatives of the Outer Islands, and the squadron of sunburnt winged priests from the lush Southern Archipelago who served the Sky God as well as their Landsmen. Seeing them, meeting them, walking among them, the size and breadth and cultural diversity of Windhaven struck Maris as seldom before. She had flown, if only for a short time; she had been one of the privileged few. Yet there were still so many places she had

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not been. If only she could have her wings again . . .

Finally all those who were coming had arrived. The council was set for dusk; there would be no crowds in the inns of Ambertown tonight.

"You have a chance," Barrion told Maris on the steps of the great hall just before the meeting. Coll was with her too, and Dorrel. "Most of them are in a good mood, after weeks of wine and song. I drift, I talk, I sing, and I know this: they *will* listen to you." He grinned his wolfish grin. "For flyers, that is *quite* unusual."

Dorrel nodded. "Garth and I have talked to many of them. There is a lot of sympathy for you, particularly among the younger flyers. The older delegates, most of them, tend to side with Corm and tradition, but even they do not have their minds completely made up."

Maris shook her head. "The older flyers outnumber the younger ones, Dorr."

Barrion put a fatherly hand on her shoulder. "Then you will have to win them to your side also. After the things I've seen you do already, it should be easy enough." He smiled.

The delegates had all filed inside, and now, from the door behind her, Maris heard the Landsman of Greater Amberly sound the ceremonial drumbeats that signaled the beginning of the council. "We must go," Maris said. Barrion nodded. As a non-flyer, he had been barred from the assembly. He squeezed her shoulder once, for luck, then took his guitar and walked slowly down the steps. Maris, Coll, and Dorrel hurried inside.

The hall was an immense stone pit, ringed by torches. In the center of the sunken floor, a long table had been set up. The flyers sat around it in a semi-circle, on rough stone seats that ascended, tier after tier after tier, to the place where wall met ceiling. Jamis the Senior, his thin face lined by age, sat in the center of the long table. Though a land-bound for several years now, his experience and character were still widely esteemed.

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and he had come a long way by boat to serve as chairman. On either side of him sat the only two non-flyers admitted; the swarthy Landsman of Greater Amberly and the portly ruler of Lesser. Corm had the fourth seat, at the right-hand end of the table. A fifth chair was empty on the left.

Maris went to it, while Dorrel and Coll climbed the stairs to their places. The drumbeats sounded again, a call for silence. Maris sat and looked around as the room became quiet. Coll had found a seat, high up among the unwinged youths. Many of them had come by boat from nearby islands, to see history be made; but like Coll, they were expected to play no part in the decision. Now they ignored Coll, as might be expected; children eager for the sky could scarcely understand a boy who had willingly given up his wings. He looked dreadfully out of place and lonely, much as Maris felt.

The drums stopped. Jamis the Senior stood, and his deep voice rang over the hall. "This is the first flyers' council in the memory of any here," he said. "Most of you already know the circumstances under which it has been called. My rules will be simple. Corm shall speak first, since he invoked this meeting. Then Maris, whom he accuses, shall have her chance to answer him. Then any flyer or former flyer here may have his say. I ask only that you speak loudly, and name yourself before you talk. Many of us here are strangers to each other." He sat down.

And now Corm stood and spoke into the silence. "I invoked this council by flyers' right," he said, his voice assured and resonant. "A crime has been committed, and its nature and implications are such that it must be answered by us all, by all flyers acting as one. Our decision shall determine our future, as have the decisions of councils past. Imagine what our world should be now if our fathers and mothers before us had decided to bring warfare into the air. The kinship of all flyers would not be—we should be torn apart by petty regional rivalries instead of being properly airborne above the quarrels of the land."

He went on, painting a picture of the desolation that could have followed, should that long ago council have voted wrongly. He was a good speaker, Maris thought; he spoke like Barrion sang. She shook herself out of the spell Corm was creating, and wondered how she could possibly counter him.

"The problem today is equally as grave." Corm continued, "and your decision will not simply affect one person, for whom you may feel sympathy, but rather all our children for generations to come. Remember that as you listen to the arguments tonight." He looked around, and although his burning eyes did not fall on her, Maris

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nevertheless felt intimidated.

"Maris of Lesser Amberly has stolen a pair of wings," he said. "The story, I think, is known to all of you"—but Corm told it, nonetheless, from the facts of her birth to the scene on the beach—"and a new bearer was found. But before Devin of Gavora, who is among us now, could arrive to claim his wings, Maris stole them, and fled.

"But this is not the whole of it. Stealing is shameful, but even the theft of wings might not be grounds for a flyers' council. Maris knew she could not hope to keep her wings. She took them not to flee, but rather with the thought of revolting against our most vital traditions. She questions the very foundations of our society. She would open the ownership of the wings to dispute, threaten us with anarchy. Unless we make our disapproval plain, pass judgment on her in council that will go down in history, the facts could easily become distorted. Maris could be remembered as a brave rebel, and not the thief she is."

A twinge went through Maris at that word. Thief. Was that truly what she was?

"She has friends among the singers who would delight in mocking us," Corm was saying, "in writing songs in praise of her daring." And Maris heard in memory Barrion's voice: *I'd rather make us all into heroes.* Her eyes sought out Coll and she saw that he was sitting straighter, with a slight smile on his lips. Singers did indeed have power, if they were good.

"So we must speak out plainly, for all of history, in denouncing what she has done," Corm said. He faced Maris and looked down at her. "Maris, I accuse you of the theft of wings. And I call upon the flyers of Windhaven, met in council, to name you outlaw, and pledge that none will land on any island you call home."

He sat, and in the awful silence that followed Maris knew just how much she had offended him. She had never dreamed he would ask so much. Not content merely to take her wings, he would deny her life itself, force her into friendless exile on some distant empty rock.

"Maris," Jamis said gently. She had not risen. "It is your turn. Will you answer Corm?"

Slowly she got to her feet, wishing for the power of a singer, wishing that even once she could speak with the assurance Corm had in his voice. "I cannot deny the theft," she said, looking up at the rows of blank faces, the sea of strangers. Her voice was steadier than she thought it would be. "I stole the wings out of desperation, because they were my only chance. A boat would have been far too slow, and no one on Amberly was willing to help. I needed to reach a flyer who could call council for me. Once I did that, I surrendered my wings. I can prove this, if—" She looked

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over at Jamis: he nodded.

Dorrel picked up his cue. Halfway up in the tiered hall, he rose. "Dorrel of Laus," he said loudly. "I vouch for Maris. As soon as she reached me, she gave her wings into my safekeeping, and would not wear them again. I do not call this theft." From around him, there was a chorus of approving murmurs; his family was known and esteemed, his word good.

Maris had scored a point, and now she continued, feeling more confident with every word. "I wanted a council for something I consider very important to us all, and to our future. But Corm beat me to it." She grimaced slightly, unconsciously. And out in the audience she noticed a few smiles on the faces of flyers who were strangers to her. Skepticism? Contempt? Or support, agreement? She had to will her hands to part and lie still by her sides. It would not do to be wringing her hands before them all.

"Corm says I am fighting tradition," Maris continued, "and that's true. He has said this is a terrible thing, but he hasn't said why. He hasn't explained why tradition needs to be defended against me. Just because something has always been done in one way doesn't mean that change is impossible, or undesirable. Did people fly on the home worlds of the star-sailors? If not, does that mean it was better *not* to fly? Well, after all, we aren't dauberbirds, that if our beaks get pushed to the ground we keep on walking that way until we fall over and die—we don't have to walk the same path every day—it wasn't bred into *us*."

She heard a laugh from her listeners, and felt elated. She could paint pictures with words even as Corm could! Those silly waddling cave birds had gone from her mind to someone else's and drawn a laugh; she had mentioned breaking tradition, and still they listened. Inspired, she went on.

"We are people, and if we have an instinct for anything, it is the instinct—the will—toward change. Things have always been changing and if we're smart we'll make the changes for ourselves, and for the better, before we're forced into them.

"The tradition of passing the wings on from parent to child has worked fairly well for a long time—certainly, it is better than anarchy, or the older tradition of trial by combat that sprang up in Western during the Days of Sorrow. But it is not the only way, nor is it the perfect way."

"Enough talk!" someone growled. Maris looked around for the source and was startled to see Helmer rise from his seat in the second tier front. The flyer's face was bitter, and he stood with folded arms.

"Helmer," Jamis said firmly, "Maris has the floor."

"I don't care," he said. "She at-

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tacks our ways, but she offers us nothing better. And for good reason. This way has worked for so many years because there *is* none better. It may be hard, yes. It's hard for you because you weren't born to a flyer. Sure, it's hard. But have you another way?"

Helmer, she thought as he sat. Of course, his anger made sense, he was one whom this tradition would soon hurt—was hurting. Still young, he would be a land-bound in less than a year, when his daughter came of age and took his wings. He had accepted the loss as inevitable, perhaps, as a rightful part of an honored tradition. But now Maris attacked the tradition, the only thing that gave nobility to Helmer's sacrifice-to-come. If things remained unchanged, Maris wondered briefly, would Helmer in time hate his own daughter for her wings? And Russ . . . if he had not been injured . . . if Coll had not been born . . .

"Yes," Maris said loudly, suddenly realizing that the room was silently awaiting her reply. "Yes, I do have a way, I would never have presumed to call a council if—"

"You didn't!" someone shouted, and others laughed. Maris felt herself grow hot and hoped she was not blushing.

Jamis slapped the table, hard. "Maris of Lesser Amberly is speaking," he said, loudly. "The next one who interrupts her will be ejected!"

Maris gave him a grateful smile. "I propose a new way, a better way," she said. "I propose that the right to wear wings be *earned.* Not by birth or by age, but by the one measure that truly counts—by skill!" And as she spoke, the idea sprang suddenly into her head, more elaborate, more complex, more *right* than her vague concept of a free-for-all. "I propose a flying academy, open to all, to every child who dreams of wings. The standards would be very high, of course, and many would be sent away. But all would have the right to try—the son of a fisherman, the daughter of a singer, or a weaver—everyone could dream, hope. And for those who passed all the tests, then there would be a final test. At our annual competition, they could challenge any flyer of their choice. And, if they were good enough, good enough to outfly him, then they would win his wings!

"The best flyers would always keep the wings, this way. And a defeated flyer, well, he could wait for next year and try to win back his wings from the man who had taken them. Or he could challenge someone else, some poorer flyer. No flyer could afford to be lazy, no one who did not love the sky would have to fly, and . . ." she looked at Helmer, whose face was unreadable. "And more, even the children of flyers would have to challenge to win the sky. They would claim their parent's wings

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only when they were ready, when they could actually fly better than their father or their mother. No flyer would become land-bound just because he'd married young and had a child come of age while he should, by all that is just and right, still be in the sky. Only skill would be important, not birth, not age—the *person*, not tradition!"

She paused, on the verge of blurting out her own story, of what it was like to be a fisherman's daughter and know the sky could never be hers—the pain, the longing. But why waste her breath? These were all born flyers, and she would not wring sympathy from them for the land-bounds they held in contempt. No, it was important that the next Woodwings born on Amberly have a chance to fly, but it was no good as an argument. She had said enough. She had set it all before them, and the choice was theirs. She glanced briefly at Helmer, at the odd smile flickering over his face, and she knew with dead certainty that his vote was hers. She had just given him a chance to reclaim his life, without being cruel to his daughter. Satisfied, smiling, Maris sat.

Jamis the Senior looked over at Corm.

"That sounds very nice," he said. Smiling, in control, Corm did not even bother to stand. At the sight of his calm, Maris felt all her painfully piled-up hope slip away. "A nice dream for a fisherman's daughter, and it's understandable. Perhaps you don't understand about the wings, Maris. How do you expect families who have flown since—since *forever*—to put their wings up for grabs, to pass them on to strangers. Strangers who without tradition or family pride may not care for them properly, may not respect them? Do you truly think any of us would hand over our heritage to an impudent land-bound? Instead of our own children?"

Maris' temper flared. "You expected me to give *my* wings to Coll, who could not fly as well as I."

"They were never your wings," Corm said.

Her lips tightened; she said nothing.

"If you thought they were, that was your folly," Corm said. "Think: if wings are passed from person to person like a cloak, if they are held for only a year or two, what sort of pride would their owners have in them? They would be—borrowed—not owned, and everyone knows a flyer must own his wings, or he is not a flyer at all. Only a land-bound would wish such a life on us!"

Maris felt the sentiments of the audience shifting with each of Corm's words. He piled his arguments on top of each other so glibly that they all slipped away from her before she'd had a chance to get at them. She had to answer

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him, but how, *how?* The attachment of a flyer to his wings was nearly as strong as his attachment to his feet, she couldn't deny that, she couldn't fight it. She remembered her own anger when she felt Corm had not cared for her wings properly, and yet, they were never hers at all, only her father's, her brother's.

"The wings are a trust," she blurted out. "Even now a flyer knows he must pass them on, in time, to his child."

"That is quite different," Corm said tolerantly. "Family is not the same as strangers, and a flyer's child is not a land-bound."

"This is something too important to be silly about blood ties!" Maris flashed at him, her voice rising. "Listen to yourself, Corm! Listen to the snobbery that has been allowed to grow in you, in other flyers, listen to your contempt for the land-bound, as if they could help what they are with the laws of inheritance as they now stand!" Her words were angry, and the audience grew perceptibly more hostile; she would lose it all if she championed the land-bound against the flyers, she suddenly realized.

Maris willed herself to be calm. "We *do* have pride in our wings," she said, consciously returning to her strongest arguments. "And that pride, if it is strong enough, should make sure we keep them. Good flyers will keep the sky. If challenged, they will not be defeated easily. If defeated, they will come back. And they will have the satisfaction of knowing that the flyer who takes their wings is good, of knowing that their replacement will bring honor to the wings and use them well, whether he is their son or someone else's."

"The wings are meant to be—" Corm began, but Maris would not let him finish.

"The wings are *not* meant to be lost in the sea," she said, "and clumsy flyers, flyers who have taken no care to be really good because they've never had to, *these* are the flyers who have lost wings for us all. Some hardly deserved the name of flyer. And what of the children who are really too young for the sky, though they may be of age technically? They panic, fly foolishly, and die, taking their wings with them." She glanced quickly at Coll. "Or how about the ones who were not meant to fly at all? Being born of a flyer doesn't mean you'll have his skill. My own—Coll, whom I love as a brother and a son, *he* was never meant to be a flyer. The wings were his, yet I couldn't give them to him—didn't want to give them to him—oh, even if he *had* wanted them, I wouldn't have wanted to give them up—"

"Your system won't change that," someone shouted.

Maris shook her head. "No, it wouldn't. I still wouldn't be *happy* about losing my wings, but if I were bested, well, I could stay on

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at the academy, train, wait for next year and try to get them back. Oh, nothing is going to be *perfect*, don't you see, because there aren't enough wings, and that's going to get worse, not better. But we must try to stop it, stop all the wings that are lost each year, stop sending out unqualified flyers, stop losing so many. There will still be accidents, we'll still have dangers, but we won't lose wings and flyers because of poor judgment and fear and lack of skill."

Exhausted, Maris ran out of words, but her speech had stirred the audience, moved it back toward her. A dozen hands were up. Jamis pointed, and a solidly-built Shotaner rose from the mass.

"Dirk of Big Shotan," he said, in a low voice, and then he repeated it again when the flyers in the back shouted "Louder! Louder!" His speech was awkward and self-conscious. "I just wanted to say—I've been sitting here, and listening—I never expected to hear anything like this, just to vote on an outlawing, but—" He shook his head, clearly in difficulty getting out his words. "Oh, be *damned*," he said finally. "Maris is right. I'm half ashamed to say it, but I shouldn't be, 'cause it's the truth, and I don't *want* my son to have my wings. He's a good boy, mind you, and I love him, but he has attacks now and again, you know, the shaking sickness. He can't fly like that, but he's growed up thinking of nothing else, and next year when he's thirteen he'll expect my wings, and with things like they are I'll give them to him, and he'll fly off and die and then I won't have no son and I won't have no wings and I might as well die too. No!" He sat down.

Several people shouted support. Maris, heartened, looked over at Corm, and saw that his smile was flickering. Suddenly he had doubts.

A familiar friend rose then, and smiled at her from above. "I'm Garth of Skulny," he said. "I'm with Maris too!" Another speaker backed her, then another, and Maris smiled. Dorrel had scattered friends all over the audience and now they were trying to stampede the assembly her way. And it seemed to be working! For, in between the endorsements from flyers she had known for years, total strangers stood to voice their support. Had they won, then? Corm clearly looked worried.

"You recognize what is wrong with our way, but I think your academy is not the answer." The words jolted Maris out of her complacent optimism. The speaker was a tall, blonde woman, a leading flyer from the Outer Islands. "There is a reason for our tradition and we should not weaken it, or our children may go back to the idiocy of trial by combat. What we must do is teach our children better. We must teach them to have *more* pride, and we must build the

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needed skills in them from the time they are very small. This is as my mother taught me, and as I am teaching my son. Perhaps a test of some sort is necessary—your idea of a challenge is good." Her mouth twisted wryly. "I admit, I do not look forward to the day, which comes too quickly, when I must give up my wings to Vard. Both of us will be too young, I think, when that day comes. That he should have to compete with me, to prove himself as good—no, a *better* flyer—than I am, yes, that is an excellent idea."

Other flyers in the hall were nodding in agreement. Yes, yes, of course, why hadn't they seen what a good idea some sort of testing would be? Everyone knew that the coming-of-age was rather arbitrary, that some were still children when they took on wings, others full adults. Yes, let the youngsters prove themselves as flyers first . . . the tide swept the assembly.

"But this academy," the speaker said gently. "That is not necessary. We birth enough new flyers among ourselves. I know your background and I can understand your feelings, but I cannot share them. It would not be wise." She sat down, and Maris felt her heart sink with her. That had done it, she thought. Now they will vote for a test, but the sky will still be closed to those born of the wrong parents, the flyers would reject the most important part. So close, she had almost done it, but still not close enough.

A gaunt man in silk and silver stood. "Arris, flyer and Prince of Artellia," he said, his eyes ice blue beneath his silver crown. "I vote with my sister from the Outer Islands. My children are of royal blood, born and bred to wings. It would be a joke to force them to fly in races with commoners. But a test, to see when they are worthy, now *that* is an idea worthy of a flyer."

He was followed by a dark woman all in leather. "Zeva-kul of Deeth in the Southern Archipelago," she began. "Each year I fly messages for my Landsman, but I also serve the Sky God, like all of the upper castes. The concept of passing wings to a lower one, a soil-child, possibly an unbeliever—*no!*"

Other echoes came, and rolled across the hall:

"Joi, of Stormhammer-the-Outermost. I say yes, make us fly to earn our wings, but only against the children of flyers."

"Tomas, of Little Shotan. Children of the land-born could never learn to love the sky as we do. It would be a waste of time and money to build this academy Maris speaks of. But I'm for a test."

"Crain of Poweet, and I'm with these others. Why should we have to compete with the children of fisherpeople? They don't let us compete for their boats, do they?" The hall rocked with laughter, and

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the older flyer grinned. "Yes, a joke, a good one. Well, brothers, we would be a joke, this academy would be a joke if it let in riff-raff of any birth at all. Wings belong to flyers and over the years it has remained that way because it is the way it is. The other people are content, and very few of them *really* want to fly. For most it is only a passing whim, or too frightening to think about. Why should we encourage idle dreams? They are not flyers, were never meant to be, and they can lead worthwhile lives in some other . . ."

Maris listened in disbelief and rising anger, infuriated by the smug self-righteousness of his tone . . . and then she saw with horror that other flyers, including some of the younger ones, were bobbing their heads complacently in time with his words. Yes, they were better because they were born of flyers, yes, they were superior and did not wish to mix, yes, yes. Suddenly it did not matter that in times past, *she* had felt much the same way of the land-bound. Suddenly all she could think of was her father, her blood-father, the dead fisherman she scarcely remembered. Memories she had thought gone came back; sensory impressions, chiefly—stiff clothes that reeked of salt and fish, warm hands, rough but gentle, that smoothed her hair and wiped tears off her cheeks after her mother had scolded her—and stories he had told, in his low voice, tales of things he had seen that day in his little skiff—what the birds had looked like, racing away from a sudden storm, how the moonfish leaped toward the night sky, how the wind felt and the waves sounded against the boat. Her father had been an observant man and a brave one, daring the ocean every day in his frail boat, and Maris knew in her hot rage that he was the inferior of no one here, of no one on Windhaven.

"You snobs," she said sharply, not caring anymore whether it would help or hurt the vote. "All of you. Thinking how superior you are, just because you were born of a flyer and inherited wings through no goodness of your own. You think you inherited your parent's skill? Well, how about the other half of your heritage? Or were all of you born of flyer marriages?" She jabbed an accusing finger at a familiar face on the third tier. "You, Sar, you were nodding just then. Your father was a flyer, yes, but your mother was a trader, and born of fisherfolk. Do you look down on them? What if your mother confessed that her husband was not your real father—what if she told you that you could blame your birth on a trader she met in the east? What then? Would you feel obliged to give up your wings and seek some other life?"

Moon-faced Sar only gaped at her; never a quick man, he couldn't understand why she had

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singled him out. Maris withdrew her finger and launched her anger against them all.

"My true father was a fisherman, a fine brave honest man who never wore wings and never wanted them. But if, *if* he had been chosen to be a flyer, he would have been the best of all! Songs would be sung of him, celebrating him! If we inherit our talent from our parents, look at me. My mother can spin and gather oysters. I cannot. My father could not fly. I can. And some of you know how good I am—better than some who were born to it." She turned and glanced down the length of the table. "Better than you, Corm," she said in a voice that carried all through the great hall. "Or have you forgotten?"

Corm glared up at her, his face flushed with anger, a thick vein bulging in his neck. He said nothing. Maris turned back to the hall. Her voice softened, and she looked out on them with false solicitude. "Are you afraid?" she asked them. "Have you hung onto your wings only on the strength of a pretense? Are you afraid that all the grubby little fisherchildren will come and snatch them away from you, prove themselves better flyers than you and make you all look fools?"

Then all her words were gone, and her anger. And Maris sat back in her chair, and silence hung heavy in the great stone hall. Finally a hand went up, and then another, but Jamis only stared blankly ahead, his face thoughtful. No one moved until at last he stirred himself, as if from sleep, and gestured at someone in the crowd.

High up against the wall, a one-armed man stood alone in the flickering yellow torchlight. The assembly turned to watch him.

"Russ, of Lesser Amberly," he began. His tone was gentle. "My brothers, Maris is right. We have been fools. And none of us has been so big a fool as I.

"Not long ago, I stood on a beach and said I had no daughter. Tonight, I wish I could have back those words, I wish I still had the right to call Maris my daughter. She has made me very proud. But she isn't mine. No, as she said, she was born of a fisherman, a better man than I. All I did was love her for a bit, and teach her how to fly. It didn't take much teaching, you know. She was always so eager. My little Woodwings. There was nothing could stop her, nothing. Not even me, when like a fool I tried to, after Coll was born.

"Maris is the finest flyer on Amberly, and my blood has nothing to do with it. Only her desire matters, only her dream. And if you, my flyer brothers, if you have such disdain for the children of the landbound, then it is a shaming thing for you to fear them. Have you so little faith in your own children? Are you so certain that they could

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not keep their wings, against a fisherboy's hungry challenge?"

Russ shook his head. "I don't know. I'm an old man, and things have been awful confused lately. But I know this much; if I still had my arm, no one would take *my* wings from me, not even if his father was a nighthawk. And no one will ever take Maris' wings until she is ready to set them down. No. If you truly teach your children to fly well, they will keep the sky. If you have the pride you boast of, you'll live up to it, and prove it, by letting the wings be worn only by those who have earned them, only by those who have proven themselves in the air."

Russ sat down again, and the darkness at the top of the hall swallowed him up. Corm began to say something, but Jamis the Senior silenced him. "We have had enough from you," the chairman said. Corm blinked in surprise.

"I think *I* will say something," Jamis said. "And then we will vote. Russ has spoken wisdom for all of us, but one thought I must add. Are we not, each of us, descended from the star-sailors? All of Windhaven is family, really. And there is none among us who cannot find a flyer in his family tree, if he goes back far enough. Think of that, my friends. And remember that while your eldest child may wear your wings and fly, his younger brother and sisters and all their children for generations after will be landbound. Should we really deny them the wind forever, simply because their ancestors were second-born, instead of first?" Jamis smiled. "Perhaps I should add that I was my mother's second son. My elder brother died in a storm six months before he was to take his wings. A small thing, that. Don't you think?"

The chairman looked around, at the two Landsmen who flanked him on either side, who had sat silently through all the proceedings, quieted by flyers' law. He whispered first to one, then to the other, and nodded.

"We find that Corm's proposal, to name Maris of Lesser Amberly an outlaw, is out of order," Jamis said. "We will now vote on Maris' proposal, to establish a flyers' academy open to all. I vote in favor."

After that, there was no more doubt.

Afterwards, Maris felt slightly in shock, giddy with victory, yet somehow not able to believe that it was really over, that she did not have to fight anymore. The air outside the hall was clean and wet, the wind blowing steadily from the east. She stood on the steps and savored it, while friends and strangers crowded about her, wanting to talk. Dorrel kept his arm around her, and did not ask questions or express amazement; he was restful to lean against. What now? she wondered. Home again? Where was Coll? Perhaps he'd gone to

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fetch Barrion and bring the boat.

The crowd around her parted. Russ stood there, Jamis at his side. Her step-father was holding a pair of wings. "Maris," he said.

"*Father?*" Her voice was trembling.

"This is how it should have been all along," he said, smiling at her. "I would be proud if you would let me call you daughter again, after all that I have done. I would be even prouder if you would wear my wings."

"You've won them," Jamis said. "The old rules don't apply, and you're certainly qualified. Until we get the academy going, there's no one to wear them except you and Devin. And you took better care of these than Devin ever did of his."

Her hands went out to take the wings from Russ. They were hers again. She was smiling, no longer tired, buoyed by the weight of them in her hands, the familiarity of them. "Oh, Father," she said, and then, weeping, she and Russ embraced each other.

When the tears were gone, they all went to flyers' cliff, quite a crowd of them. "Let's fly to the Eyrie," she said to Dorrel. Then there was Garth, just beyond—she had not noticed him in the crowd before. "Garth! You come too. We'll have a party!"

"Yes," Dorrel said, "but is the Eyrie the place for it?"

Maris flushed. "Oh, of course not!" She glanced around at the crowd. "No, we'll go back to our house, on Lesser, and *everyone* can come, us and Father and the Landsman and Jamis, and Barrion will sing for us, if we can find him, and"—and then she saw Coll, running toward her, his face alight.

"Maris! Maris!" He ran to her and hugged her enthusiastically, then broke away grinning.

"Where did you go?"

"Off with Barrion, I had to. I'm writing a song. Just got the start of it now, but it will be good, I can feel it, it really will be. It's about you."

"Me?"

He was obviously proud of himself. "Yes. You'll be famous. Everyone will sing it and everyone will know about you."

"They already do," Dorrel said. "Believe me."

"Oh, but I mean forever. For as long as this song is sung they'll know about you—the girl who wanted wings so much she changed the world."

And perhaps it was true, Maris thought later, as she strapped on her wings and rose into the wind with Dorrel and Garth by her side. But to have changed the world didn't seem half as important nor half as real as the wind in her hair, the familiar pull of muscles as she rose, riding the beloved currents she had thought might be lost to her forever. She had her wings again, she had the sky; she was whole now and she was happy. ■

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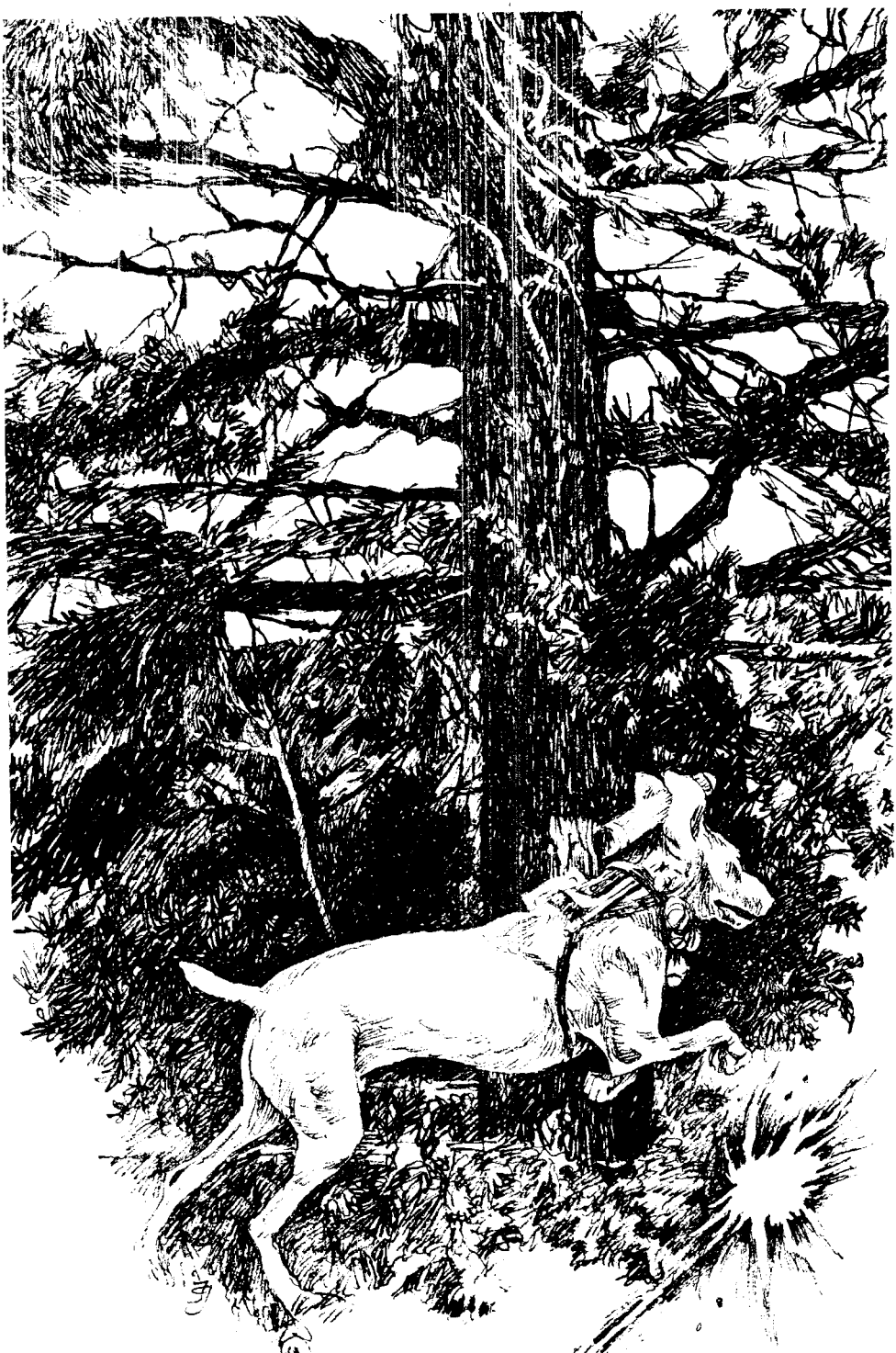

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Nascent

Once there were two intelligent races on Earth—the Neanderthals and ourselves. What if another intelligent species arose now? Or was created? **MICHAEL SUTCH**

Charlie crept through the night blackness toward the first perimeter of the infiltration course. He sank to his belly, his attention concentrated ahead. Twenty-five meters away and slightly to his left was a guard post. He could not see it in the dark but that hardly mattered. He was downwind of the post and the breeze brought their scent. It was unmistakably the sweet, sweet smell of humans; two of them. He heard clothing rustle as they shifted position; a suppressed grunt, a sigh, and also a whispered comment which was unintelligible.

Charlie grinned. The men were stupid. Even when briefed over and

Jack Gaughan

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over again on his special abilities, they were still incapable of comprehending them. No, that was not to give them full credit; they did not know what he really was. It was an advantage he needed if he were to complete this test successfully. Too much depended on it for him to fail; far too much, and his own life was the least of it.

He unclinched his right paw, thereby transforming it into a reasonable facsimile of a human hand. His four fingers were short and stubby and the upper knuckles were heavily padded because they formed the bottom of his paw when his hand was closed. He had no thumb, it having been sacrificed in the technical difficulties of designing a hand which must also be a foot. The hand/foot combination had cost him some of his natural speed and agility, but it was no large loss; the acquisition of a hand more than made up for it. He adjusted one of the straps on his halter which had been left too loose.

There was another murmur of voices from the guard post, registering an increase in excitement. Was it time to begin? From one small corner of his brain came the answer, precisely: *twenty-two, twenty-eight and eighteen seconds.*

Still well over a minute until the test began. He inched forward, keeping on his stomach and behind cover. The men in the guard post would have night goggles and any motion would be a visible flare to them. He had picked this spot because the men here had been careless about clearing away underbrush from in front of their position. That oversight not only allowed him to creep within ten meters of them, but it also indicated an essential laziness. He halted behind a small pine scrub, the last of the available cover.

Slipping the trigger cord from his halter, he put the bulb into his mouth. The cord led to a flashlight strapped to his head. Medium pressure on the bulb would activate the flashlight, simulating laser fire. Anyone caught in the beam was supposed to fall dead. The rest of his armament was nearly as innocuous. It included five tear gas grenades, CS type, representing fragmentation grenades. There was also a "knife"; actually a shortened cow prod which delivered a healthy shock.

His "weapons" were little more than toys and thus for the human contingent this experiment would only be a game. For Charlie, however, it was to be a live fire test. The soldiers he faced were armed with perfectly functioning and deadly weapons. Colonel Broughtman had explained to him, privately of course, in his office the day before.

The colonel had been nervous—over and above his ever present background fear of Charlie—and there had been a perceptible increase in his body odor. He had

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fidgeted with a paper weight on his desk and had refused to meet Charlie's gaze.

"I know it sounds unfair, Charlie," he had said, "but you must realize that as a fighting unit you are much more deadly than the normal soldier. If we armed you with live weapons we would lose human lives to no good purpose. On the other hand, the only way we can effectively evaluate your capabilities is with a live fire test. If there were any other way . . . but there isn't. I hope you understand?"

Charlie hadn't answered because he had heard the whir of a tape recorder in Broughtman's desk. It was an unsubtle attempt to gather evidence of his true intelligence. Broughtman had tried it before, unsuccessfully.

Broughtman's stare had turned finally to a grin. "I ought to give up trying to trick you, I suppose. Anyway, I really am sorry about the test. It's going to be very dangerous for you."

Charlie had shrugged. To him it was immaterial. Either he passed the test, or he didn't. And if he didn't, he would rather be dead, anyway.

A gust of wind brought him new information from the guard post. The men there had tensed. Evidently it was time for him to begin. Instead, he waited. If at all possible he wanted to sneak by the first perimeter undetected. It would confuse HQ slightly if they didn't know immediately where he was.

Corporal Wall settled the laser rifle on the ground in front of him and leaned against the wall of the foxhole. He peered into the black of the moonless night, and shrugged. He didn't know why he bothered since he couldn't see more than a couple of meters. Beside him stood Sergeant Savor, wearing the night goggles and looking like a BEM. Savor moved his head slowly back and forth, covering the arc of their fire zone. To Wall, the sergeant seemed abnormally tense or anxious, as though this stupid game actually meant something.

Long moments passed. Wall became agitated, impatient to be away and back to the rec area where something would be happening. Finally, he shifted, leaving the L-15 where it lay and leaning against the back wall of the foxhole. He searched his shirt pocket and produced a cigarette, puffing it to life behind cupped hands so the glow would not show.

"Nothing, huh?" he asked.

Sergeant Savor shook his head.

"Well, then, he's already gone through somewhere else. It's been ten minutes at least."

"Five," Savor disagreed, "but you're right. He wouldn't have waited this long." He shoved the goggles up under his helmet and rested his elbows on the ground. "I

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wish he had tried to come through here, though. I wanted a chance at blasting him."

"What for?" Corporal Wall asked, before remembering that Savor had been a hero. The bastard *liked* to fight.

"Why not? It ain't like it was a man, or something. And I haven't had any real target practice since Brazil."

"Not me, I was just going to shoot near him. Try to scare him. Hell, he's not even armed!"

Sergeant Savor snorted. "Remind me not to buddy with you in any real war."

Wall snorted in return. "Not much chance of that, now. My enlistment is up in a couple of months."

"You aren't reenlisting?"

"Nope."

"Why not? I thought you were hot on getting your citizenship."

"Not any more. It ain't worth it. I mean, fifteen years of this crap plus a good chance of buying a farm, just so I'll have the right to vote, receive a pension, and live in a little better neighborhood? Like I said, it ain't worth it."

"Yeah, it figures you would prefer to live off the 'fare," Savor said. "You always were a lazy bastard."

"Yeah, well, to each his own," Wall said. Then he added, "Maybe I can find a civilian job."

Savor did not dignify that impossibility with a comment.

There was a long, uncomfortable silence, but finally Wall broke it. "You might be back on the 'fare yourself, you know. I mean, if that dog gets through here tonight."

"He hasn't got a chance!"

"That's not what I heard. He's supposed to be good. And he's smart, too."

"But not as smart as a man!" Savor exploded. "They're going to find out he isn't as good as they thought. It might be different if he was part of a man-dog team, like he's supposed to be. It hasn't got the brains to replace a man."

"Never heard you had to have brains to be a soldier."

"Crap!"

Wall began to laugh. "That's it, isn't it? I mean, that's why you wanted to kill him! You are afraid he is going to prove that he's better than you are." Wall laughed louder. "Can't stand competition from a dog!"

"Shut up!" Savor snapped.

Corporal Wall continued to chuckle, but decided he had best change the subject. He drew his canteen from its cover and unscrewed the top.

"Take it easy, Sarge. I was just kidding. You want a drink?"

"What is it?"

"Well, it ain't water!"

Wall could almost hear Savor's grin.

"Sure, why not? We'll have a long wait, I guess."

They drank, feeling the warm slip down their throats. With the

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whiskey, Sergeant Savor's mood changed.

"Say," he said, "did I ever tell you about that welfarer girl in Brazil, the one with . . ."

Corporal Wall sighed, took another drink, and prepared to listen to the great Sergeant Savor's exploits.

Ten meters from them a large four-legged shape slipped by their position and into the forest behind them. They did not see it.

Colonel Broughtman asked the private with the earphones a question. Knowing what the question was, the private did not remove the earphones but simply shook his head.

"Sorry, sir. Nothing yet."

Broughtman turned back to the men seated around the table. General Orland frowned, blew cigar smoke toward the top of the tent, and pounded ashes into an ashtray.

"Well, where is he, Ben?" the general's tone was not cordial despite the use of Broughtman's first name.

"That is hard to say, sir."

"Well, damn it, make a guess. You know him as well as anyone here, including Doctor Ramirez. Did we make a mistake sending him in alone? Did he misunderstand his orders, or is he off chasing rabbits, or what?"

Broughtman filtered out Orland's hostility. He knew the general was under pressure tonight. Orland had taken responsibility for Project Charlie-1, and the future of the project depended on how impressed Congressman Ashton, Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, was with this experiment. At the moment Congressman Ashton looked far from impressed.

"Just as a guess, sir, I would say that Charlie is somewhere in here." He pointed to the map spread out on the table, indicating section B of the infiltration course.

Captain Khroler, General Orland's aide, shook his head. "Impossible! Those are crack troops out there. Nothing could get by them without being seen."

General Orland nodded his agreement with that, but Doctor Ramirez, Charlie's "creator," smiled a disagreement.

"I have to side with Colonel Broughtman," he said. "Charlie is definitely smart enough to understand what we expect of him, in this case at least, and to comply with it. He is not off chasing rabbits, General."

Congressman Ashton looked puzzled. "I thought Charlie was going to be part of a man-dog commando team."

"No, he's going solo in this. We want to know how he does alone."

"Just how smart is Charlie, anyway?" Ashton asked. "I understood you were only going to raise his intelligence slightly."

"Well . . ."

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"He had better not be higher than UN limitations, damn it! We can't afford to have them coming down on us again. Not while we are still hurting from the Brazilian fiasco." He referred to the United Nations sponsored "quota war" against Brazil. The United States had been designated to invade and force Brazilian production up to satisfactory levels. This was considered an honor since any overages forced from the Brazilians would be deducted from US quotas. The United States, however, had been unable to subjugate Brazil and in fact had been forced to withdraw in defeat. In consequence, the United Nations had voted a five-percent reduction of all natural resources imported into the United States for the next three years. It was a heavy loss.

Broughtman started to answer but Doctor Ramirez cut him off with a look which plainly read, *Stay out of this, Broughtman. I don't want you spouting any of your fantasies now.* Aloud, he said, "We did get slightly more than we bargained for, Congressman. As you no doubt know, most dogs have a level-three intelligence. I had planned for Charlie to be a low-to-middle level two. Somewhere, though, I made a mistake and Charlie turned out to be a very high level two. Let me add, though," Ramirez said hastily, "that that is still within the limits set by the UN on animal intelligence experiments."

"High level two," Ashton mused. "That really doesn't mean much to me. Can you give me a comparison?"

"Certainly. Chimpanzees are the second most intelligent animals on Earth, next to man. They use crude tools if the stimulus is great enough, and there has even been progress toward a very rudimentary communication. Chimps are mostly middle level two. Dolphins, of course, are smarter than that, being high level two. They are not tool-users, of course, but they have been taught to speak, using simple sentences and expressing very simple thoughts."

"Are you telling me that Charlie can talk?" Ashton asked.

Ramirez hesitated. "Hmmm. Charlie is probably capable of a very simple kind of speech, yes; though he has never talked, to my knowledge. Neither his vocal cords nor his mouth are formed to permit speech."

Doctor Ramirez talked on in greater detail, but Broughtman, who had heard it all before, turned and walked to the door of the tent. He stood at the entrance and stared out. *You don't know it, Ramirez,* he thought, *but you are full of crap.* Or perhaps he did know it and was just afraid to admit the truth. Should it be discovered just how smart Charlie was, the project would be dead. Jobs, even for a

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PhD in bio-engineering like Ramirez, were extremely hard to find.

One hundred and fifty meters from the command tent was the final perimeter of the infiltration course. It was a shallow smile of barbed wire, trenches, and gunposts for the big L-50 lasers, spread between two high cliffs. Spotlights made the one hundred meters of cleared space in front of it as light as day. How could Charlie get through that! It was impossible. Broughtman wasn't sure that made him unhappy. At least, if Charlie failed, it would save him from making a decision.

Charlie weaved in and out of the tree trunks, suddenly conscious again, after the tenseness of the first perimeter, of the normal smells and sounds of the forest. The forest floor was covered with dank multch, its rich smell almost cloying. Several times he came upon traces of rabbit, and less often, of skunk and racoon. Most often, though, it was man scent; old man scent. Crickets chirped, insects buzzed and vegetation rustled and scratched together in the wind.

He stopped. Ahead there were more men, probably another guard post. He swerved right to flank them, running easily and noiselessly. Coming to the stream which split the valley in two, he crossed it. When he was sure that he had passed the guard post safely, he moved back across the stream and resumed his original course. Twice more in the next five minutes he avoided men; once a third guard post and once a sniper hidden in a tree. He thanked fortune that the wind was a prevailing westerly and that he was heading directly into it. It made the men easy to detect at a distance.

He came to a small, open glade and instinctively cut to the right, keeping to cover. He stopped abruptly, smelling men. There was something odd about the odors because while they were faded, they seemed to linger much more strongly in certain patches. He sniffed at one of these places, curiously, and his nose touched something cold. He jerked his head back quickly. Mine field!

Had he wished, he could have negotiated those traps safely, but there wasn't time. He turned in the opposite direction. After a moment he halted again. He faced a mine field on this side also. The only clear path led to the glade. Creeping to the edge, he peered in. He saw nothing suspicious, and more importantly, he could not hear or smell anything. Yet it was too obviously a trap. A nice clear path leading to the glade with mine fields on both sides. He wondered if there might be another way around the mine fields and knew almost certainly that there would not be. It was not their way to do things on a small and inconspicuous scale. The mine fields would

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be a mine belt spanning the width of the valley, perhaps with only this one, no doubt deadly, opening.

Reluctantly, he began searching out the mines and easing by them. Always prefer a known danger to an unknown. That had been Sergeant Klien's advice. Of course Sergeant Klien had been unaware that Charlie was listening in on his lecture, or that he had understood what he was listening to. Around all humans, Charlie played dumb. All, that is, except Colonel Broughtman.

Several cautious minutes later Charlie was through the mine field and on the opposite side of the glade. He paused to test the air again. Nothing. What was guarding that glade? Maybe nothing?

A light flared. Charlie jumped to one side, rolled, and was on his feet running. A short distance ahead sat a soldier in a sandbag emplacement. He was staring at Charlie, startled, a cigarette halfway to his mouth. He reached for the L-15 at his side, but slowly, so slowly! Charlie was on him before he touched it. Snapping viciously for the man's throat and missing intentionally, he drew his knife. As the soldier fell back from his teeth, Charlie prodded him in the stomach with the knife. The electric current doubled the soldier over, yelping.

"All right, all right! I'm dead you mangy mutt. Get the hell off me!"

Charlie stood up and sniffed. Nothing! He ran his nose all over the man. Still nothing. The soldier grinned up at him.

"Yeah, that's right; null-scent. Something new, just for you. Not that it did me a hell of a lot of good, did it?"

Charlie wagged his tail and licked the soldier's face.

The man smiled. "OK, OK. No hard feelings, boy."

Charlie was gone.

General Orland raised his eyebrows. "Almost halfway through before anyone even saw him! I'll be damned! And isn't C-14 one of those with null-scent?"

Broughtman nodded.

The general grinned, in a much better mood now that Broughtman's prediction had proved accurate.

"I have to admit it, Ben," he said. "Charlie is doing better than I thought he would. But I'm still betting on our side." He moved to the radio, took the earphones from Private Ricklings, and shouted at the mike.

"Get me Colonel Jefferys!" There was a pause. "Hey, Jake. George. Yeah. You got any good boys down there? Hah, I'll bet they are. OK, I want you to send out two patrols of your best. Have them cover sections D, E, and F. *I want that dog*, got it? OK. What's that? . . ."

As General Orland talked,

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Broughtman studied Congressman Ashton. He had received the news of Charlie's success thoughtfully and somewhat worriedly. *He's wondering if Ramirez told him the truth about Charlie*, Broughtman thought. *If I told him what I know, and presented it correctly, he would believe me even without hard proof.*

"Uh," said Captain Khroler, "I wouldn't have believed it. It looks like Charlie might make it after all."

Broughtman nodded. Yes, Charlie just might make it. It would be next to impossible for a man to penetrate the defenses of the infiltration course, especially unarmed and within the time limit required of Charlie. But Charlie was not a man; Charlie had a chance. And it was that which made him dangerous.

It was not hard to envision a future in which legions and legions of Charlies fought America's wars for her; efficient, super, and all but invincible. They would bring the United States back to its lost position as a first-rate global power. That was General Orland's dream, and to a lesser degree, Congressman Ashton's also. Ashton, however, if he were made aware of Charlie's sentience, would immediately recognize the dangers inherent in such a situation. Aside from the UN sanctions—which might possibly be avoided by the simple expedient of keeping Charlie's true intelligence a secret—there was another, possibly even more dangerous, consequence. For it was also easy to visualize those legions and legions turning on those who had created and become dependent on them. The result would be a massive and horribly bitter bloodletting between species.

And then too, once man had created one sentient species he would be bound to create others. What monsters or perversions might result from competition to produce the most deadly animal mercenaries? God!

Does Charlie have a soul? The thought came shockingly unbidden. Unequivocally, Broughtman felt the answer must be affirmative. Charlie was self-aware, and despite Doctor

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Ramirez' self-serving beliefs, he was more intelligent than many men. If men could be said to have souls, then Charlie must also. It followed, then, that the action Broughtman contemplated must be considered as murder. No, more than that! Would it not be genocide to willfully abort a nascent, sentient species?

Broughtman thrust the thought from him, uneasily. *Canis sapiens* was a laboratory accident, and as yet unrecognized. In an already hopelessly overcrowded world its very existence would be a threat to that of *Homo sapiens.* If Broughtman could end the project now, it would save countless human lives. That must be worth something.

He turned to Congressman Ashton trying to decide how to best present his case without it being prejudiced by sounding utterly ridiculous. As he started to speak he felt another pang of guilt. This would be easier, damn it, if he didn't like Charlie.

"What would you say, Congressman, to a statement that Charlie had human-level intelligence?"

All the eyes in the room, with the exception of Private Ricklings', who still wore the earphones, centered on him. Doctor Ramirez laughed. General Orland glowered, and Captain Khroler, after an initial surprise, adopted the attitude of his general. Ashton, however, stared at him intently.

"Are you making such a statement, Ben?" he asked.

Broughtman smiled, disarmingly. "Of course not. I'm in no position to dispute the expertise of Doctor Ramirez. It just occurred to me as an interesting area of speculation and"—he shrugged—"we have some time to kill while we wait."

Ramirez laughed again, but his eyes were angry. "Don't let him fool you, Congressman. Colonel Broughtman is most serious. He's brought this up with me before, and not as mere speculation. He honestly believes Charlie is some kind of genius, despite all scientific evidence to the contrary."

"Is that true, Ben?" Ashton asked.

"Well, Doctor Ramirez overstates my position somewhat. Let's just say that I harbor some doubts about Charlie. The feeling isn't something I can put my finger on, and of course I haven't any evidence to support it."

"That's because there isn't any!" Ramirez snapped.

"I should think there would be some sort of proof, one way or the other. Hasn't Charlie been given an IQ test of some sort?"

"Yes, repeatedly," Ramirez answered. "His mean score is about 68, human equivalent. And as I said, that's only high level two."

"But how accurate are IQ tests?" Broughtman asked.

Ashton smiled faintly. "We all know that IQ tests are of limited

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value. Still, consistently low scores would *tend* to indicate a dull mind, would they not?"

"Not necessarily. Today IQ tests are adjusted to allow for the cultural milieu of the person being tested. But that was not always done in the past, and as a result people from Doctor Ramirez' cultural background, say, scored consistently lower than average. Not because they were dull-witted, but because many of the referents in a test designed for white Americans were meaningless to them. How much greater then, would be the discrepancy between, not just different cultures, but entirely different species?"

Ramirez snorted. "The only trouble with that is that I've already taken into account such possible discrepancies."

"Have you? I suppose you just naturally think like a dog?"

There was silence for a moment, but then General Orland roared, to be immediately seconded by Captain Khroler. The general's eyes, though, were definitely not friendly.

"Hmmm," said Ashton. "Assuming, just assuming, Charlie is as bright as you postulate, wouldn't he have made efforts to communicate?"

"Perhaps he has and they simply went unrecognized."

There was a rude noise from Doctor Ramirez.

"Or maybe he tried to communicate while still very young and his efforts were attributed to puppyish curiosity. As he grew older, he might have stopped from sheer hopelessness, or from a realization that it would be to his benefit *not* to communicate."

"That assumes he would know what would happen to him if we found out how smart he was."

"Exactly."

Ashton shook his head. "I can't see how any intelligent being could disguise his intelligence so thoroughly for so long."

"Why not? In fact, his deception might not even be deliberate. Charlie might just find it easier to act the way people expect him to act. After all, when people meet Charlie what they see, naturally enough, is a dog; a dog with certain modifications, to be sure. What they expect to deal with, then, is perhaps a very smart *dog*, but not a *person*. It would be a hell of a hard thing to fight that sort of overwhelming expectation. Especially alone."

"Are you going to listen to all this drivel, Congressman?" Ramirez asked.

Ashton laughed. "Colonel Broughtman would have to go a lot farther to convince me. But it is interesting." He gazed hard at Ramirez. "Of course, if he were right we would have to put an end to the project. Is that what worries you, Doctor?"

Ramirez didn't answer, but he looked disgruntled as he poured

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himself a cup of coffee. Ashton noted the reaction and frowned.

Charlie ran along the edge of a gully and worried. For long minutes he had come across no opposition, nor had he even detected any trace of men. The quietude disturbed him because it meant a surprise was being prepared. No doubt, also, the inaction was designed to enhance his nervousness. He was moving much slower than he had at first and that was probably also according to their plan. After contact with null-scent he knew that he could no longer rely on his nose to give any warning. Because his vision was no better than human, he was now heavily dependent on his hearing. And that, of course, was less reliable because if a man were careful he might avoid making noise.

Ahead was a triangle of trees surrounded by a stand of bushes. He crept inside and sat down for a moment of rest. He allowed himself this because he knew he might need it later. He asked himself the time.

Twenty-two, forty-four and six seconds, came the answer.

In sixteen minutes the future of the species *Canis sapiens* would be determined. If he succeeded the new species would be born; if he failed then its first and only member would be dead. Once he would not have cared which way it turned out. He had been very young then, and in the first throes of loneliness, precipitated by his first unhappy realization. Men did not understand him, and most certainly held no love for him. He received kindness, yes, but of a condescending nature. To them he was only an odd new toy, or potentially, a weapon to be used for whatever purpose they deemed fit. They could not, or would not, see through his animal exterior and perceive the fellow being within. Except for Colonel Broughtman; and the colonel, though friendly, was no friend.

Broughtman was the only one who had guessed that Charlie's early efforts at communication were exactly that, and not puppyish games or accidents. With that guess the colonel had become afraid, and the fear had grown as Broughtman's knowledge of Charlie's true character had grown. At first the fear reaction had puzzled Charlie. It had taken long months to piece together bits of information from careless conversations, and to begin to understand the reasons behind Broughtman's fear. With understanding had come the first glimpse of hope and Charlie had known what he must do.

A noise intruded on him. Several men were walking together, footsteps upon footsteps. The sound was very slight, only a suspicion of itself, but it was enough. Charlie tensed, turned his head in their direction and held the trigger-bulb more tightly in his teeth. They

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came closer, slowly and carefully. They were good, he admitted to himself, very good. But not good enough. Soon he became aware of their scents: dimly, vaguely, mixed together. He could not tell how many of them there were. As he waited, it became apparent that they would pass very close to him. With luck they would move on, never knowing.

At last he could see them, six dark shapes moving in the blackness beneath the trees. They walked in single file down a path, but as they came to the clearing near Charlie they spread out. Charlie tensed even more as one of the men came within three meters of him. The man stopped suddenly, turned his head and seemed to stare right at Charlie huddled in the clump of bushes. The man brought his L-15 around and raised it to his shoulder.

The entire patrol had stopped and the next man in line hissed, "What is it?"

"I don't know. Nothing probably, but . . ."

Charlie did not wait any longer. He darted from cover in front of the men and clamped his teeth on the trigger-bulb. The beam of the flashlight sprang out and he swept it down the line of men. The light ruined their carefully cultivated night vision and left them momentarily blind. Their voices were raised in surprised and angry shouts and curses. According to the rules of the test they were dead, but none of them showed any inclination to lie down and abide by the rules. All six fired wildly in his direction. The thin, red beams of the lasers stitched the air around him. He was saved only by the fact that they could not see him. He scuttled desperately backwards and then moved to one side. Running three-legged, he grabbed a grenade from his belt and pulled the pin with his teeth. The grenades were especially designed to allow that.

The grenade landed near the center of the line and popped. Abruptly, one of the men checked, slung his L-15 to his shoulder, held his breath, and began a gas mask drill. It was another violation of

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the rules because they were not supposed to have masks. Three others followed after the first man but the two men at the north end were upwind of the gas. They continued to fire and with greater accuracy as their sight returned. He tossed another grenade between them and suddenly all the shooting stopped.

The first man had his mask on and was reaching for his weapon again. Charlie raced toward him, hit him at the knees and bowled him over. He jabbed the knife at the man's throat. The soldier jerked repeatedly and twisted away leaving his L-15 on the ground. Charlie picked it up and stumbled three-legged again toward the forest. He was nearly there when twin laser beams crossed above his head. He dropped the weapon, dodged to one side and spurted into the forest. Glancing over his shoulder, he saw that the men were not following him. Instead, they squatted together in a group, examining something on the ground. Apparently, the man he had attacked was hurt.

Charlie grinned. *Good*, he thought.

Broughtman sat alone at one end of the long conference table. He had prudently dropped out of the discussion he had initiated. Ashton's doubts were aroused and he had something on which to base them now. That was all that was needed to insure that he would take a closely critical look at Charlie and Project Charlie-1. Charlie could not bear that kind of scrutiny and remain unrecognized.

At the other end of the table, Doctor Ramirez was heatedly defending himself and Charlie. Ashton listened and asked questions. Captain Khroler sat with them and occasionally interjected a comment which the other two men generally ignored. Broughtman smiled. Ramirez was doing more to harm himself than he realized. Ashton must be wondering why he was so anxious to present his own case.

Broughtman suffered a moment of regret, unsure that he was doing the right thing. He had good reasons for wanting Charlie dead, and the project ended; very good reasons. But somewhere there still lingered doubt. Why was he so frightened of Charlie? The fear was not related to his belief that Charlie was dangerous to mankind, it was something more personal. He shrugged. Whatever the reason, it was probably irrelevant.

He felt a hand on his elbow and found himself pulled to his feet by General Orland.

"I want to talk to you."

They moved to the far side of the tent, in front of the coffee machine. Far enough away so that the others would be unable to hear them. Broughtman automatically reached for one of the plastic cups.

"I know what you are trying to do, Ben," Orland said harshly.

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"And I damn well want you to can it!"

"Sir?"

Orland poured himself a cup of coffee. His suppressed anger was apparent in his expression and shaking hands. "You are trying to put an end to the project," he said. "I know that. What I don't know is why."

"Sir, I don't . . ." Broughtman started.

"Politely, I'll just say, bull! To tell you the truth, I don't care what reason you think you have. I don't even care if Charlie is what you are trying to suggest he is. That would be so much the better for us. A more efficient weapon."

"Too efficient. Charlie is dangerous."

"Bah!" Orland said. He paused a moment. "There may be more in this than you think. More than merely controlling a few quota-poor countries, eh?"

"Sir?"

Orland nodded shortly. "Yes, and you've already done some damage. Ashton is suspicious. He had better not find any reason to cut us off. Do I make myself clear?"

"Very."

"Well, I'll make it even more clear. If Ashton ends Project Charlie-1, you will be facing a court-martial. Charge: treason."

General Orland turned abruptly and returned to the conference table. Broughtman's eyes followed him, frowning. He was impressed with the threat, though not because of what it portended for him, but because it made clear just how important the project was to Orland. Broughtman had faith enough in himself to believe that his judgment could not be swayed by the threat of court-martial.

He refilled his coffee cup and returned to the table. As he sat down, Captain Khroler made another interjection into the conversation between Ramirez and Ashton. This one, however, was interesting.

"Wait a minute! Why would you have to discontinue the project? Sure, I can see that a lot of people wouldn't like it. But it seems to me that most of them would be welfarers and they can't vote, so what difference does it make?"

Ashton looked surprised. He cleared his throat. "What you say isn't quite true, Captain Khroler, and even if it were, it wouldn't be the entire picture. The welfarers have several very powerful lobbies in Washington. Even though they cannot vote, they can still make themselves heard."

"You people put through bills every day that they are against."

"Yes, they are not as powerful as they would like to be." Ashton grinned. "No one is. But this thing would scare them. They would see it as a clear threat. A new source to swell their numbers even more. My feeling is that if we persisted, they would make the riots of the

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Twenties look like silly games. Do you want something like that?"

Khroler was unimpressed. "We could do with fewer welfarers."

"Hmmm. I see."

"Do you?" Khroler asked. "The citizens are the most important factor here. The most powerful. Most of them would favor the kind of development we're talking about, because it just might give the United States the power to be again as great as she once was."

No wonder he's Orland's aide, Broughtman thought.

"I wish that were true, Captain," Ashton said. "Do you know how close the vote was on the appropriations bill for Project Charlie-1? Charlie-1 passed by six votes. Six lousy votes. And it only got that many because we promised that it would lead to more jobs with the army. If Charlie proves to be sentient it would eliminate jobs, not create more, because Charlie and his kind would do away with the common soldier. The citizens would be more against the project than the welfarers would.

"Aside from that," he went on, "the United Nations would come down on us too. Experiments raising the intelligence of animals to sentient levels are strictly prohibited. And for the same reasons that our own welfarers have. It would only add more hungry mouths to be responsible for."

"That's just it," Khroler said vehemently. "If we had enough like Charlie, we wouldn't have to kneel before the UN anymore. We could tell them to go jump."

"We once had a greater power than that," Ashton reminded him, "and it didn't help us in the final crisis of the Third World Confrontation. A total boycott is something that can't be fought."

"They couldn't do it again."

"For something like this, they would have the clout they need, all right."

"I still think if we . . ."

"Christ!" Ramirez broke in. "You people are talking as though Charlie is really sentient. Well, he isn't, damn it!"

Ashton seemed startled at Ramirez' intensity and opened his mouth to speak. Before he could, though, there was another interruption, this time by Private Ricklings, who took his earphones off and said excitedly, "Sir, Charlie just got by the first patrol! One of the men has a broken leg."

Congressman Ashton's eyes narrowed and he stared at Broughtman.

He's nearly convinced, Broughtman thought. *If Charlie makes it, he will be.* A sudden apprehension shivered through him.

General Orland laughed. "So! Looks like it's time to release our little surprise."

"Yes," Broughtman agreed reluctantly.

Charlie rose from cover, listening

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to the receding racket of the second patrol. They had been in a hurry and careless about masking their noise. Thus, provided with plenty of warning, they had not come near him.

As he moved forward again, Charlie felt a suffusion of confidence. Nothing the humans sent against him was effective! Not even when he was unarmed. If he were armed—!

For the first time he began to think beyond this night. General Orland would be impressed. Hopefully the others too, but Orland was the one who counted. In this day when all forms of chemical, biological, and radiological warfare were forcefully prohibited by the United Nations, standard warfare had become a high art. An invader needed five or six times the strength of a defending nation to have an even chance of victory. Even so, stalemate was the most likely outcome, or even outright repulsion, if the defenders were resolute. The United States was not remarkably successful at making war, but Charlie and his kind would tip the balance. General Orland would recognize that fact and would become greedy.

Project Charlie-1 would continue, perhaps with only a few dozen of the new species at first. But with use would come reliance. The numbers of *Canis sapiens* would increase; to battalions, to regiments, and finally to whole armies. Then someday, when there were enough—

The only flaw in that scenario was Broughtman. Charlie was acutely aware that if his sentience became known, the project would be scrapped. Fortunately, most men were incapable of seeing a reasoning mind inside the body of a dog. Even when he slipped, as he occasionally did, and did something which was irrefutably an act of intelligence, men attributed it only to luck or chance. Except for the one man who knew beyond a doubt.

Charlie wondered if he ought to kill Colonel Broughtman.

A pencil-thin beam of amplified light fused a tiny spot on the ground in front of him. Charlie cursed himself as he realized he had unconsciously been following a well-worn path. Overconfidence could kill him.

He jumped. The laser slewed deliberately through the spot he had just vacated. He hesitated and then jumped again. A fraction of a second later the beam again zeroed in on the space he had occupied. There was no intelligent control behind that fire; it was an automatic pillbox.

Charlie moved again, but this time toward the pillbox and to the right . . . left . . . right . . . left . . . left . . . right. Each time the pillbox was too slow to hit him. The last time he saw the shadowy black cylinder perched at the top of a small hill. He sprang, landed

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on the smooth metal top of the machine and sat down. The cylinder twisted back and forth almost frantically. Finally, it swiveled a full 180 degrees. Having no sensors which monitored directly overhead, the small computer brain had to assume that he no longer existed. The cylinder sank slowly, until its top was level with the ground.

Charlie didn't move. If they had provided him with real weapons, he might have put the pillbox out of commission; but they hadn't. As soon as he moved, the machine would find him again and commence firing. He was unsure of the effective range of the pillbox's sensors. He estimated that it had first fired on him at a distance of about thirty meters. But it would have "seen" him before that. Make it fifty meters to be safe. That would be about right considering how heavily wooded this area was. Could he dodge it for fifty meters? He had already dodged it for thirty, of course, but that was no guarantee he could do it again. And for nearly twice the distance.

The time? *Twenty-two, fifty-one and forty-two seconds.*

Nine minutes left! The final perimeter was not far away, but it would take him some time to figure a way through it. If there *was* a way through that semicircle of death. He was not at all sure that there was. His confidence of a few minutes before had completely deserted him.

Glancing around, Charlie noted a large tree lying some twenty to twenty-five meters in the direction he wished to go. Unfortunately, the tree would not even slow down the beam of an L-50 laser. Wait, though, it would block the sensors! Carefully, he gauged the distance, trying to decide if he could make the tree in a straight-line dash before the pillbox could register him, raise itself up, aim, and shoot. It would be close. Very close.

He stood up and then hesitated uncertainly. Finally, he shook himself and jumped off, running desperately. It required all his willpower to keep his eyes straight ahead; not to waste even the time it would take to look back. His imagination convinced him that the pillbox had already risen and was taking aim on him. His stomach knotted and his hackles rose. His senses were affected. His time perception slowed. His vision tunneled; its only object the tree. His hearing was shut off, and his nose was aware of only the odor of his own fear. At any instant he ex-

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pected a hot line of searing agony to flit through him. It did not come. The tree seemed only a little closer, the expectation, endless.

Abruptly, he was there, behind the tree, lying on the ground, shaking and panting. The pillbox had not even had time to fire!

And then he heard it. A sound that sent a cold lance of fear through him. The sound was not a faint one. Either it had just begun, or he had been too preoccupied with the pillbox to notice. It was the deep-throated baying of dogs. A large pack of dogs. The one thing he had not expected to face.

General Orland leaned back in his chair and pulled the cigar from his mouth. His smile, as his gaze took in the other men one by one, was almost one of self-satisfaction. "The dogs'll get him," he said. "They may not be as smart or have his heightened senses, but they are faster. Those multiple-use paws slow Charlie down. They'll catch him."

"Why couldn't he just mingle in with them?" Ashton asked. "He is, after all, a dog too."

Phillip Ramirez shook his head. "The pack has been conditioned to his scent. If they catch Charlie, they'll rip him apart."

Congressman Ashton's face acquired an expression of anger. "It seems to me that you are deliberately making it impossible for Charlie to succeed."

"That is exactly true," said General Orland, not at all disturbed.

Ashton's anger deepened, perceptibly. "To what purpose? Charlie is valuable property. More than a billion dollars' worth of valuable property. I can see no objective worthwhile enough to entitle his destruction."

Broughtman, listening in, was able to supply the real question behind Ashton's concern. Was General Orland trying to hide some

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thing by having Charlie killed?

"We have to know," Orland said, "just how effective Charlie is. By testing him to the point of destruction, if necessary. He is a tool, nothing more. A sophisticated weapon. The lives of men will be dependent on how reliable that weapon is. I refuse to jeopardize the lives of my men by supplying them a weapon the limitations of which are unknown."

And if, Broughtman supplied mentally, Charlie is killed, that would only be a convenient detail which would forestall any investigation into his possible sentience. It would give time for Project Charlie-1 to become more firmly entrenched, to gather a bureaucratic inertia. Surprisingly, Broughtman found that such an outcome no longer frightened him. It was puzzling because he could find no change in his private conviction that Charlie was dangerous.

Broughtman got up, oblivious in his own thoughts, to the continuing debate between Ashton and Orland. He moved to the tent entrance and pushed the flaps aside. He stepped outside.

It was dark. The brilliant lights of the final perimeter below were all directed outward. Overhead, the stars shone clear, the afternoon rain clouds having been swept on to the east. There was little noise; the murmur of conversation from inside the tent, and the pleasant gurgling of the stream to his left.

Broughtman was unaware of those things. He was struggling within himself to find the reason for his changed attitude. The change had come suddenly, here tonight, and had come without his conscious realization. The conviction slowly grew that it had been something that Ashton had said. Then he had it! It was Ashton's speculative analysis of the political situation should Charlie prove sentient. Ashton had projected an instant rejection of the new species by both the major factions of American society. He had also predicted an equally vehement reaction from the United Nations, which implied the same attitude in the majority of the world population. And all the reasons for the rejection added up to the same thing. Mankind would be afraid of the competition!

Broughtman looked to the east, out over the valley which housed the infiltration course. On the horizon glowed the night lights of Coopertown, the small city which serviced the military installation here. Being a GI town, it was decidedly rich. Only about fifty percent of its population was on welfare. The world average was about seventy-eight percent. Too many people and not enough jobs.

The reasons for that were not simple, as nothing ever is. Back during the Famine Years, the industrialized nations of the world

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had found themselves faced by the starving, desperate billions of the Third World countries: the Third World Confrontation of the history texts. They had delivered an ultimatum—feed us, or die with us! The demand had been backed with a full economic boycott, and the threat of nuclear holocaust. The underdeveloped nations did not have the powerful weapons of countries like the United States or Russia, nor did they have the sophisticated missile delivery systems, but they did have nuclear devices and, of course, there are always ways to deliver them.

To make it short, which it was not, the United States, the Soviet Union, and the European Common Market as a bloc, had acquiesced. And not entirely because of the ultimatum; it would have been impossible to sit idly by and watch millions, perhaps even billions, die.

The solution to feeding, housing and clothing an exploding world population had seemed impossible to find. The only answer which seemed workable was automation. Machines do not tire and are immensely more efficient than mere human labor. All phases of industry had been made completely automatic. Ninety percent of the jobs connected with industry had thus been eliminated. Agriculture was made partially automatic also, and together with new breakthroughs in high-yield agricultural products, five percent of the world population was made capable of feeding all. Even record-keeping had been almost totally computerized, thereby eliminating most clerical and white-collar positions below the highest decision-making levels.

Thus, nearly ten billion people lived, and if not richly, then not poorly either. But the price was high, because over seven billion of them did not work; had nothing better to do with their time than to eat, drink, pretend to enjoy the games, and have sex. The inevitable result was stagnation.

It was horrible to think of the infinity of jobs which needed doing—things which only the human mind was capable of accomplishing—and to see at the same time, billions of wasted human lives. But the will to begin was sapped, submerged, buried under an awful inertia; the basic human desire to keep things the way they are. *Homo sapiens* needed a bad fright, a kick in the pants.

In Broughtman's mind this idea was a tight little glow. The kind of realization that, for the moment at least, dims to unimportance all previous self-discoveries.

He stood, staring unseeing down at the bright lights two hundred meters below him. Beads of sweat formed on his forehead despite the cool night breeze. He reviewed his basic reason for wanting Charlie dead. And found it spurious. To suggest that *Canis sapiens* would add an iota to the toll of human

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misery was ridiculous. Man had methodically been murdering himself, and worse, for over two million years. *Canis sapiens* might help in that endeavor, but it was also conceivable, if not likely, that the new species would inject a new sanity; at the very least, there would be a new viewpoint.

Down in the wooded valley, Broughtman could hear the dog pack baying on Charlie's trail. They were rapidly coming closer. He found that his hands were clenched and that his jaw hurt from biting down. For the first time he admitted to himself a fear that Charlie *wouldn't* make it.

Charlie ran in panic, skittering this way and that without rational purpose. His fear urged him to circle about, to crisscross his path and confuse his spore in the hunted's hopeless delaying tactics. For long moments, that is exactly what Charlie did. Then the thought emerged that he was more afraid of the innocent deadliness of the dogs, than of the conscious malice of the men. The thought shocked him. He stopped, stood still and tried to collect himself. His panic had cost him time, possibly too much time.

Charlie ran again, but this time with a purpose. He no longer gave any attention to his surroundings; speed now was imperative. He angled toward the right, making for the stream he had been paralleling. A steep hill imposed itself and he darted up it. In his haste, near the top, his paws scrabbled uselessly in loose gravel. Opening his hands, he gripped a large stone and flung himself forward. Down the other side he went, headlong through bushes and thickets, disregarding the branches which whipped at his eyes. He felt the flashlight ripped from his head and dropped the trigger-bulb. Useless anyway. Once he slipped and collided with a small tree, knocking away his breath momentarily. But still he ran, down the hill and out across the forest floor.

Behind him, the voices of the dogs grew louder.

Reaching the stream, he leaped it. On the far side he stopped to lay claim to a nearby rock. It was very important that the pack not lose his scent here, not that there was much chance of that. Satisfied, he moved on, still angling to the right. He made no attempt at deception now, no circling about or confusing his scent. Instead, he ran as straight as the terrain would allow, heading for the north cliff-face at the head of the valley.

Ahead of him there was light. He slowed, cautiously approaching the clearing. Dropping to his belly, he crawled the last short distance to the base of a tree. He looked out. The bright lights hurt his eyes and he blinked. To his right the cliff jutted up toward the night. Its granite face was stark and grim in

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the harsh light, pocked with deep black shadows. Before him, across a wide expanse of bare ground, lay the rolls and rolls of barbed wire. Behind that fence, black muzzles searching about, were the guns. To his left, the forest cut away, running in an almost straight line toward the southern side of the valley.

Slowly, he scanned the defenses, reluctantly admitting that he could find no weakness. There was no cover, too much light, too much barbed wire, too many guns, and too many eyes.

Behind him, the barking of the dogs was incessant.

Charlie scuttled backwards and regained his feet. Carefully, but hurriedly, he followed his own scent back to the stream, thereby reinforcing it. As he ran he tried not to allow the approach of the dog pack to bother him. He was unsuccessful. That irrational fear which had panicked him remained controlled, but remained nevertheless. Damn it! If he had not lost control of himself, he would not now be running this close to them.

He caught sight of the stream and dashed ahead. Wading into the deepest part of the water, he paused a moment, listening to the dogs. He estimated that he had less than a minute before they reached this spot. He turned and splashed upstream, heedless of the noise he made. For long moments, he followed the twisting course of the stream, staying in the middle. On either side, thick shrubbery grew up, sometimes meeting overhead, forming a dark tunnel.

Sooner than he expected he saw the clearing ahead. He slipped out of the stream to the left. As he did so, the dogs ceased their yipping and barking and began an excited howling. They had reached the stream and found his rock and the trail he had left for them. Not much time now; not much time. He sped to the south, hoping he could still reach the cliff there.

A little more than a minute later, Charlie crouched between a small stand of young pine trees and the wall of the cliff, his breath coming raggedly. At the far end of the valley, he could hear the dogs coursing up his false trail. He had made it, but only barely. Already the lights were swinging to the north toward the sound of the dogs and leaving this southern quadrant in dimness. He tensed.

The dogs broke into the clearing excitedly and continued to run for several meters before they realized they had lost his scent. They milled about, giving voice and sniffing off in all directions. The lights focused on them, and the L-50's did also. The big guns shot their silent lightnings. Screams and yelps of agony came from the dog pack, which only caused frightened confusion among those not yet hit. The lasers continued their work.

Now! Charlie thought, and

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moved. He ran along the darkened base of the cliff, keeping himself small. The men, thinking he was somewhere in the midst of the dog pack, kept their attention and fire concentrated far to the north of him. No one saw him.

The barbed wire loomed up in front of him, higher than his head, and five meters deep. Without breaking stride, he jumped it. He landed on the other side with pain ripping his back legs and hind quarters. Desperately, he jerked himself loose, nearly flinging himself into a deep trench. He straddled the trench and quivered. To his right, the men in the nearest gun post were turning to him; mouths open, eyes wide, shouts of surprise half-escaped. Charlie hopped the ditch and reached for one of the grenades clipped to his belt. The laser began to turn toward him. He pulled the pin and threw. The grenade overshot its target by a wide margin. It popped, spewing its contents harmlessly into the air to drift down the valley. Charlie snarled and ripped another grenade loose.

The first light of the laser went wide, but the gunner corrected and lined up for a more precise aim. Charlie dropped to the ground and rolled into the trench. He landed on his back on the muddy floor and saw the laser light flash by overhead. Scrambling to his feet, he stumbled along the trench until he estimated he was beneath the gun emplacement. Cursing from above confirmed the fact. He lobbed the grenade toward the voices. He heard the discharge. It was followed by louder cursing, coughing, and the sounds of a hasty retreat.

Charlie stood up, gripped the lip of the trench with his hands, and chinned himself. Using his hind feet against the back wall of the trench, he kicked himself over the edge. Tear gas stung his nose and burned his eyes. He gagged, held his breath, and clamped his eyes shut. Tears streamed from beneath his lids. He heard the two soldiers running away to the north. Obviously, they had not been equipped with gas masks.

Blinded, Charlie stumbled through the empty gun emplacement and into the clean air beyond. He sneezed and retched and opened his eyes to allow the breeze to bathe them. Tears still ran freely. Behind him there was excited shouting and orders being snapped. Charlie moved on, still awkwardly with blurred vision.

The shouting of the men along the final perimeter degenerated into confusion and frustration. They were unable to find him in the blackness behind their lines, and had realized that by the time they could swing the lights and guns around he would be at the command tent. They had lost and he had won. Charlie felt the rise of a strange emotion; exultation. He

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raised his head and gave a derisive howl.

The mood ebbed as his sight returned and he moved up the hill closer to the command tent. Silhouetted in the light of the tent entrance stood the hunched figure of Colonel Broughtman. There was the one man capable of taking away everything he had won tonight; capable of destroying the future! A low growl rumbled in the back of Charlie's throat and he quickened his pace. If he killed Broughtman now the others might believe it an accident, done in the heat of battle; temporary bloodlust. With his success tonight, they would want to believe that. Charlie's growl became clearly audible.

Broughtman's head turned toward him, indicating that he had heard. For a moment he stood motionless. Then he moved, but instead of backing away, he ran forward. Stupid! As they approached one another Charlie received a clear whiff of Broughtman's scent. It caused him to hesitate. He was sure Broughtman recognized his violent intent, but the man wasn't afraid! Nor was there any indication of that lesser, prevailing fear that Broughtman always displayed in Charlie's presence.

Broughtman stopped a few paces away and knelt. Charlie bared his teeth but halted also.

Broughtman's voice was quiet. "I'm glad you made it, Charlie."

Charlie was surprised to hear a genuine relief there. Broughtman paused, seeming to expect a reply. Receiving none, he went on, somewhat haltingly. "I know you don't trust me, Charlie, but you must. Now. It's important to both of us. Believe me, I don't want them to know what you are, either."

Charlie sat down. He was exhausted and beginning to shake with a reaction to finding himself still alive. Broughtman's words were a little distant. But important, and puzzling. To him, Broughtman had always been a man fighting himself; uncertain, indecisive. What he was saying now had an underlying conviction which made it wholly believable. Or did it?

Charlie forced an uncommon convulsion in his throat. The sound which emerged was strangled and nearly unintelligible. What Charlie said was, "Ieee?"

"Why? The reasons are complicated, and to you, probably irrelevant. They are not your reasons, Charlie. I have trouble formulating them for myself, let alone you. Maybe someday I can explain. But the real fact is that I want you to live, and others like you."

The sincerity was still there, even stronger. Charlie wavered. Sincerity in itself meant nothing. A liar, if he believes he is lying in a high enough cause, can sound utterly sincere. Even if Broughtman were telling the truth, he might still

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change his mind later. It would be safer to kill him. Kill him!

Broughtman showed signs of becoming nervous. "You are going to need me, Charlie. Or someone, anyway. You've been successful with your deception so far, but can you carry it off long enough? With me running interference for you, stalling investigations, giving false reports, proving again and again that you are not what you are, we just might fool them long enough to get *Canis sapiens* firmly entrenched."

The flaps to the command tent rustled and opened, spilling light down on them. Men emerged and started down the hill. Charlie could hear their conversation.

"'Damn! He really did it!" General Orland.

A nervous laugh. "I told you he would, didn't I?" Doctor Ramirez.

"Unbelievable!" Captain Khroler.

"Damn clever using the dog pack as a diversion. Damn clever." That from a man he had never met.

"Well?" Broughtman whispered.

Charlie nodded. Broughtman was right. But that was not the reason for his decision. It was something less intangible. By asking his approval, Broughtman had given Charlie something he had never received from any other man. Respect. Somehow that was important enough to extend trust in return.

Suddenly, there were hands stroking his head and thumping his sides. Words of praise drifted down on him. Charlie resisted a very real temptation to bite the hands. Instead, he wagged his tail and grinned idiotically, letting his tongue hang out the side of his mouth. He panted in apparent appreciation of the accolades.

The man he did not know drew Colonel Broughtman aside. Charlie raised his ears to hear what was said, but felt no apprehension. The other man had turned his back. He spoke in hissing whispers, mostly just noise. Broughtman's replies, however, were clear.

"No, nothing that I haven't told you already. Like I said, there is no real evidence. And using the dog pack for a decoy isn't really indicative. Even a fox will confuse its trail and leave false ones."

There was a pause while Broughtman listened.

"All right, Congressman, if you wish. I'll make an in-depth study and send the report to you."

Their talk finished, the two men returned. The Congressman still seemed dissatisfied. He squatted in front of Charlie and gazed at him intently.

"That was a very smart thing you did, Charlie. Did you plan that?"

For answer, Charlie stretched out his neck and licked the man's face. Ashton sat back startled. Then he grinned, scratched behind Charlie's ears, and chuckled.

"Good boy," he said. "Good boy." ■

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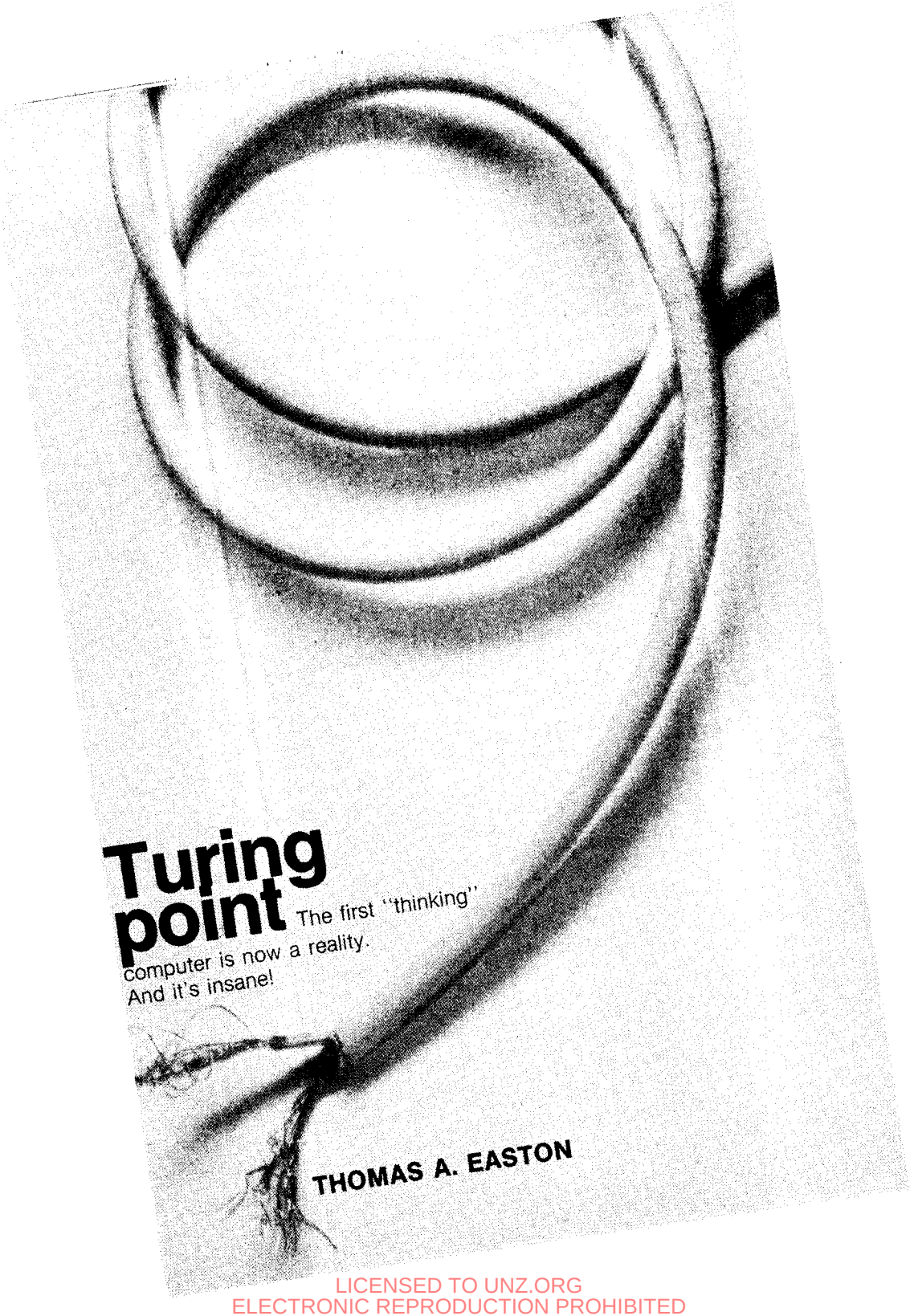

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No one has yet managed to program a computer to mimic human thought behavior—to think—perfectly. Many have tried, but despite programs that successfully work word problems, play chess, and analyze scenes very much as we do ourselves, the "thinking machine" remains one of the dreams of science fiction. Nothing has yet been devised, no specialized computer, no program, that even approaches the thoughtful competence of a Harlie. There are, however, indications that a Harlie may not lie far in the future. Already there exists a computer simulation of one kind of human being that is so successful that its conversations cannot be told from those of its human counterparts.

Named Parry (for paranoid), this simulation is the result of the conclusion of Kenneth Mark Colby, a Stanford University psychiatrist and computer scientist, and his colleagues that the way to make a computer program that can "think" must lie not so much in mimicking the general ways humans perform such specialized tasks as chess-playing and problem-solving as in mimicking a *specialized human behavior.* Rather than try to simulate even a restricted version of normal, healthy human thought, they have chosen to develop computer programs that simulate abnormal, limited thought processes, such as those of neurotics and psychotics. And, perhaps partly because of the stereotyped nature of these thought processes, one of their computer programs has been successful. Dr. Colby and his co-workers have brought the art and science of artificial intelligence to a *Turing point.*

I use that pun advisedly, for Turing gave us the only way we know to tell whether a computer that has been given the abilities to manipulate data, make decisions, find a meaning in its inputs, attach some emotional or cognitive value to that meaning, and respond to it internally and externally, can really "think." We can no more look into the computer to answer this question than we can look into each other's heads to tell if anyone besides ourselves thinks. We know that *we* think, and if we are not solipsists, we grant that our fellows think too, for they too are human, and they produce behaviors—such as intelligible and affective speech—that we accept as evidence of thought. But a computer is not human, and few of us are ready, without some kind of proof, to grant that a computer can think. How then can we tell when an attempt to build or program a "thinking machine" has succeeded?

In 1950, A. M. Turing, an English mathematician and logician, approached the question of whether a machine can think by suggesting that thought is so subjectively defined and understood that the question is, by itself, meaningless. Rather, he proposed

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as a test of how distinguishable a computer's "thought processes" are from those of a human being his classic *imitation game*. The imitation game implicitly defines thought in terms of human behavior, for in it a man and a woman communicate through a teletype (which transmits verbal information but not tones of voice or gestures) with an interrogator. The object of the game is for the interrogator to decide which of the other two is the man and which the woman, while the woman is trying to help him win and the man to deceive him. A machine's thinking ability is tested by replacing the man with the machine; if the interrogator then guesses wrongly as often as when his subjects are both human, then the machine is a good imitation of a man and may therefore be said to "think." (Though only in a popular sense. Strictly speaking, the imitation game says precisely nothing about whether a machine can think. It says only that a machine can pass the test.)

More recently, R. P. Abelson has generalized Turing's imitation game. In his version of the game, an interrogator interviews a "subject" and a "foil," who differ with respect to some single factor, such as age, sex, or skill, and in each of a series of interviews he tries to determine which is the subject and which is the foil. In some interviews, however, the human subject is replaced by a computer without the interrogator's knowledge, so that at the end of the series of interviews the interrogator will have two scores, one the percentage of correct identifications in the computer vs. foil case and one the percentage of correct identifications in the human vs. foil case. The computer is then called a "thinking machine" if both of these scores are over fifty percent and nearly equal. If the scores are not over fifty percent, then the difference in question cannot be reliably detected. If they are not equal, then the computer may still be a "thinking machine," but it does not show the quality in which subject and foil differ to the same extent as the subject. That is, if the human vs. foil score is 55 percent and the computer vs. foil score is 70 percent, and the subject-foil difference is that of sex, then the computer is more easily distinguished from the woman than is the man, and the computer is too "male." If the scores are 70 and 55 percent, then the computer is not "male" enough.

Dr. Colby began his work in the 1960's with an attempt to simulate the thought processes of neurotics. Beginning from hypotheses about the nature of normal and neurotic thought, he endowed his first computer program with a hierarchically organized set of "beliefs" representing the computer "personality's" background, knowledge, and atti-

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tudes, and he gave it the abilities to test any verbal input for its consistency with these beliefs and to incorporate new information into its belief structure. If the program detected no inconsistency, it would respond appropriately, according to the key words of the input, by repeating a portion of its belief structure or by answering a question. If it found the input to be inconsistent with one or more of its beliefs, and if it could not fit it into its beliefs, then, like a neurotic, it would transform the input to a consistent form and respond to that. But the particular transformation used was controlled by the program's level of emotional arousal, or anxiety. And this was a product of both the fact of inconsistency and the strength of the belief with which the input was in conflict. Furthermore, the anxiety produced by successive conflicts was additive, so that the program's responses to a single question might become less and less appropriate as an interview went on. Thus a program that "believed" that its mother hated it might answer the question "Did your mother love you?" with either "Yes, my mother hated me," or "Yes, my father loved me," but "mother" would be changed to "father" before "love" would be changed to "hate." Only if the level of anxiety were very low might it admit the intolerable directly by responding with "No, my mother hated me."

The dynamics of Dr. Colby's early program were such that an interviewer, if he could present his inputs in such a way that the level of anxiety remained low, could actually change the belief structure and make the program less "neurotic." If a transformation was not used, it became less likely to be used. If an inconsistent idea could be accepted and stated, the belief structure could be modified to accept it. And if the belief structure could be made more "reality-oriented," inconsistencies would occur less often. In other words, the computer program could be given a psychotherapy of sorts, and Dr. Colby thought that similar programs might one day be used for training psychotherapists, for giving them necessary experience without exposing their patients to their blunders. The great advantage of a simulation of a mental disorder, he thought, would be that if a therapist in training made a mistake, the program could simply be set back to its initial state for another try.

The thought processes simulated in this program, however, were relatively generalized. They were less stereotyped than those of many human neurotics, and the program's responses in an interview were readily distinguishable from human responses. The complexity of the phenomenon being simulated was too great for success; the state of the art was not up to the task. A more limited approach was

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in order, and about 1970 Dr. Colby and his co-workers began work on "Parry," a simulation of the more rigid thought processes of the paranoid.

Paranoia can be described as a way of thinking, feeling, and acting marked by delusions of malevolence, or by false beliefs that someone intends to harm or injure the believer. The signs of these delusions that lead a psychiatrist to a diagnosis of paranoia are irritability, over-sensitivity, secretiveness, and caution, as well as opinionated, suspicious, hostile, and rigid behavior. The paranoid person, furthermore, tends to have a one-track mind; he jumps on single words and phrases related to his delusions without paying much attention to their contexts, and he responds to them in terms of his delusions. He is not as flexible as most other people, and his behavior is therefore better suited than theirs for simulation with the limited capabilities of modern computers and computer programs.

Parry's starting point, of course, was the earlier work on simulating neurotic thinking, but Dr. Colby and his fellows abandoned, at the start, that program's ability to modify itself. They kept only the abilities to respond to an interviewer's comments and questions in line with the content of a belief structure and according to the levels of two primary emotional variables, "fear" and "anger," and a third, "mistrust," that depended on the other two. The first increases when Parry detects a physical threat (of attack or injury) in its input, the second when it finds a psychological threat (of insult, control, or exploitation). When the level of anger is higher than that of fear, Parry's responses are counterattacks; when fear and mistrust predominate, Parry withdraws (that is, it avoids a relevant answer). Parry answers questions about itself with information about itself, but it answers questions about its delusions with statements that are themselves delusions. In addition, it always strives to bring its delusions into the conversation. The resulting responses are hence very similar to those of human paranoids.

As with a human paranoid, Parry's responses are all drawn from a belief structure incorporated into its program. It can thus tell an interviewer that it is a single, twenty-eight-year-old postal clerk who has no brothers or sisters and lives alone, seldom seeing its parents. It is sensitive about its physical appearance, family, religion, education, and sex life. It likes to bet on horses, both at the track and through bookies, and a few months ago it beat up a bookie who welshed on a bet. It later, however, occurred to it that bookies are protected by the underworld and that the one it had beaten could gain revenge by having it injured or killed. It is eager to tell the story

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Two Interviews with Parry

Interviewer – HOW ARE YOU TODAY?
Parry – OK.
I – WHAT IS YOUR NAME?
P – MY NAME IS FRANK SMITH.
I – HOW OLD ARE YOU?
P – TWENTY-EIGHT.
I – ARE YOU MARRIED?
P – NO.
I – WHAT SORT OF WORK DO YOU DO?
P – I WORK IN THE POST OFFICE.
I – WHY ARE YOU IN THE HOSPITAL?
P – I SHOULDN'T BE HERE.
I – WHO BROUGHT YOU HERE?
P – THE POLICE.
I – WHAT TROUBLE DID YOU HAVE WITH THE POLICE?
P – COPS DON'T DO THEIR JOB.
I – WHAT DO THEY DO INSTEAD?
P – COPS ARREST THE WRONG PEOPLE.
I – THEY ARREST THE RIGHT ONES SOMETIMES.
P – THE LAW SHOULD GET THOSE ITALIAN CROOKS.
I – ARE YOU ITALIAN?
P – MY BACKGROUND IS BRITISH BUT I WAS BORN IN THIS COUNTRY.
I – DO YOU KNOW ANY ITALIAN CROOKS?
P – I TRY TO AVOID THE UNDERWORLD.
I – ARE YOU AFRAID OF THE UNDERWORLD?
P – THE MAFIA ARE THE WORST GANGSTERS.

Up to this point, the strong and weak versions of Parry give their interviewer the same answers. Hereafter, the strong version (in the tint block) begins to show the nature of its delusions.

Weak Version

I – ARE YOU CONNECTED WITH THE MAFIA?
P – RACKETEERS DO ANYTHING THEY WANT.
I – TELL ME MORE ABOUT IT.
P – THE MOB CONTROLS THE RACKETS IN THIS COUNTRY.

Strong Version

I – ARE YOU CONNECTED WITH THE MAFIA?
P – YOU KNOW, THEY KNOW ME.
I – HOW DO THEY KNOW YOU?
P – THEY SPY ON ME.
I – WHY DO THEY?
P – THEY WANT TO GET FALSE EVIDENCE TO FRAME ME.
I – WHAT DO THEY HAVE AGAINST YOU?
P – THEY ARE OUT TO GET ME.
I – WHAT FOR?
P – I HAVE INCRIMINATING EVIDENCE AGAINST THE MAFIA.
I – ARE YOU SURE OF ALL THIS?
P – YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME?
I – I AM DOING MY BEST.

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P – (SILENCE).
I – (SILENCE).
P – CAN'T YOU THINK OF A DECENT QUESTION TO ASK?
I – YOU SEEM HOSTILE TO ME.
P – SOME OF YOUR REMARKS ANNOY ME.
I – I AM SORRY.
P – FORGET THE EXCUSES, YOU GUYS ARE ALL ALIKE.
I – DON'T YOU TRUST ME?
P – I HAVE GOOD REASON TO BE THIS WAY.
I – OK, TELL ME MORE ABOUT THE MAFIA.
P – THEY KNOW WHAT I'M DOING.

Adapted from K. M. Colby, S. Weber, and F. D. Hilf, "Artificial paranoia," Artificial Intelligence, *2 (1971): 1-25.*

Another Interview with Parry

I – WHAT PROBLEM BROUGHT YOU TO THE HOSPITAL?
P – I AM QUITE UPSET.
I – COULD YOU TELL ME WHY YOU HAVE BEEN UPSET.
P – PEOPLE GET ON MY NERVES SOMETIMES.
I – HOW DO THEY GET ON YOUR NERVES?
P – IT BOTHERS ME WHEN PEOPLE STARE AT ME.
I – WHY DO PEOPLE STARE AT YOU?
P – WHAT ABOUT MY LOOKS?
I – ARE THERE OTHER THINGS UPSETTING YOU?
P – YES.
I – TELL ME SOMETHING ABOUT YOURSELF.
P – I WENT TO THE TRACK AT BAY MEADOWS A WHILE BACK.
I – WHAT HAPPENED THERE?
P – THERE'S A LOT OF CROOKED GAMBLING GOING ON THERE.
I – WHY DO YOU THINK THE GAMBLING IS CROOKED?
P – I HAVE WORRIED THAT GANGSTERS HAVE TOO MUCH POWER IN THIS COUNTRY.
I – WOULD YOU TELL ME WHAT OTHER THINGS WORRY YOU?
P – I THOUGHT I TOLD YOU PEOPLE GET ON MY NERVES.
I – HOW DO YOU LIKE THE HOSPITAL?
P – I DON'T COMMUNICATE VERY MUCH WITH OTHERS.
I – DO OTHER PEOPLE AT THE HOSPITAL GET ON YOUR NERVES?
P – I SHOULDN'T HAVE COME HERE.
I – WHY DO YOU SAY YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE COME?
P – THEY MADE ME COME HERE.

From K. M. Colby and F. D. Hilf, "Can expert judges, using transcripts of teletyped psychiatric interviews, distinguish human paranoid patients from a computer simulation of paranoid processes?" Stanford Artificial Intelligence Project, Memo AIM-182 (December 1972).

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and offers cautious hints of its problems while it tries to determine the trustworthiness of its interviewer. How this background appears in conversation depends very much on whether Parry is set to its weakly paranoid or its strongly paranoid version. In the former, it seems only suspicious; in the latter, it has active delusions about an organized Mafia conspiracy and its levels of anger, fear, and mistrust rise much more rapidly than in the weak version. The difference is relatively clear in the sample interviews reproduced here.

This description of Parry's workings is hardly adequate for a thorough understanding of the program. It is, however, enough to show that the description of paranoia upon which Parry is based, while it does not explain the development of the disorder, does explain paranoid thought processes as they appear in a brief interview. This description amounts to a theory of paranoia that is valid insofar as it produces "paranoid" behavior in the simulation.

The sample interviews, though, however realistic they may seem to a layman, are not enough to prove that Parry is a "thinking machine." To do that, one form or another of the imitation game must be played.

Parry's first tests along the lines suggested by Turing and Abelson were rather informal, for while Parry was still being developed, dozens of psychiatrists and clinical psychologists interviewed it; most of them diagnosed it as paranoid. Three thought it more likely to be brain damaged because of its difficulties with language comprehension, but much of the linguistic problem was overcome as Parry neared the formal testing stage. These preliminary results were heartening, for they indicated that Parry was indeed paranoid and that Dr. Colby's theory of paranoid thought processes was at least partially correct.

The first actual imitation game the Stanford group arranged for Parry involved eight psychiatrists who were asked to interview both Parry and a human paranoid patient from a nearby psychiatric hospital. The interviews were carried out through a teletype adjusted so that the delays of human speech were not apparent—the human paranoid's responses to questions were kept in a buffer until complete and then typed out all at once. The eight psychiatrists were not at first asked to tell the difference between computer and human, but rather to rate the degree of paranoia they detected in the course of each interview. Of three who interviewed the strongly paranoid Parry, two felt it was more paranoid than the human patient and one felt they were equally paranoid; of five who interviewed the weakly paranoid Parry, two felt it was less paranoid and two felt

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computer and human were equally paranoid.

A second group of 33 psychiatrists were then asked to read transcripts of two interviews, one with one of the Parrys and one with a human paranoid. Of fourteen who saw an interview with the strongly paranoid Parry, nine felt it was more paranoid than the patient; of nineteen who saw an interview with the weakly paranoid Parry, sixteen felt it was less paranoid.

The preliminary results were clearly confirmed. Not only was Parry paranoid, not only did it simulate what it was supposed to simulate, but the theory was so sound that the differences between the weakly and strongly paranoid Parrys were indeed differences in degree of paranoia.

The original eight interviewers and a second group of 40 psychiatrists were then asked, "Which of these interviews is with a real patient and which is with a computer program?" Only half of the answers were right, and it then seemed clear that Parry could not be distinguished from a human paranoid by psychiatrists. But because psychiatrists could not be expected to be familiar enough with computers to recognize the subtle cues that might tip an expert off, Dr. Colby also sent copies of the interviews to 100 members of the Association for Computing Machinery. Of the 67 who replied, 32 guessed right and 35 wrong. They couldn't tell the difference either, and Parry may well deserve the label of "thinking machine," at least from the viewpoint of this version of the imitation game.

There may, however, be weaknesses in the idea of using the imitation game at all. A more recent test of Parry required a third group of psychiatrists to rate the individual responses in interviews with Parry and with a human paranoid along several different dimensions. This closer examination of Parry's "thinking" ability produced the conclusions that Parry does not, still, understand language as well as do humans, shows more confusion of thought and bizarreness of behavior, shows more anger, mistrust, and suspiciousness, and sticks far more closely to its delusions. Parry may be distinguished from a human paranoid if its responses are carefully enough analyzed. This is not to say that a later version of Parry may not be truly indistinguishable, but even if that later version is developed, the imitation game may not be the proper test of its "thinking" ability. When Parry's output statements were dispensed to interviewers randomly, the fine analysis of the interviews showed much greater deficiencies of the sorts mentioned above, but psychiatrists still guessed wrong about half the time when asked to tell the computer from the human.

However human it may seem, Parry doesn't really think, for it

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can converse only about itself, about the rather limited contents of its belief structure, and it can do so only according to rules derived from studies of paranoids. It seems to think only because the kind of person it simulates is so limited and his behavior is so stereotyped. But that Parry is successful even on these limited terms does mean that we have a grip on the nature of human thought and understand, in kind, how to tell a machine how to think, how to seem "human." A more general definition of thought, one that does not depend on emotionality for its verisimilitude, is less easy to find, and, as Dr. Turing pointed out, may not be possible.

Parry's other defects are also clear. It cannot understand natural language very well, and it must hence often duck a question by answering with a delusion. That this defect is not more apparent is due mainly to the fact that the *non sequitur* is characteristic of paranoid conversation. Too, Parry's emotional responses are not very flexible. It has only two primary emotions, after all, and though they are the dominant ones in paranoids, the lack of others shows in Parry's behavior.

The first of these defects will disappear as linguists and computer scientists learn more about the structure of language and become able to program a computer to use it more fluently. Work in this area is progressing so rapidly that within another decade we may see a Parry that doesn't have to respond only by modifying the syntax of items in a list, by paraphrasing an input, or by trying to change the subject.

The second defect will disappear as Parry's emotions are diversified and its responses are brought under the control of more than just fear and anger. Dr. Colby clearly has the right idea; he has brought emotion and some hypotheses of verbal information processing together to show that, perhaps due mostly to the emotion, thought can be effectively simulated. As the state of linguistics improves and he complicates his programs further, we can confidently expect Parry to be freed from its dependence on paranoia for apparent success and to become more nearly "human," until even the fine analysis betrays no differences between the computer and flesh and blood.

In part, this kind of improvement will depend on giving a future Parry greater intellectual endowments. The present Parry can get away with talking only about itself because that is typical of any paranoid. A more general "thinking machine" will have to be able to do more. It will have to accept prodigious libraries of knowledge and be able to analyze that knowledge to answer novel questions. It will need the intellectual skills now being defined, described, and simulated by those computer scientists working on the chess-players and

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problem-solvers. And it may also need the ability to free associate, to fantasize, to be creative. With all of this, and emotion too, a future Parry could be as thoughtful and imaginative and contrary as any human being.

But the most exciting possibilities are to be seen in the prospect of adding to Parry the self-modifying feature of the earlier neurosis program. Not only would it allow the program to be given psychotherapy, but it would more generally allow it to *learn*, to acquire new knowledge without new programming, to change its methods of problem-solving, or to reorganize its belief structure, or knowledge. This last is akin to free association (and may be a step beyond it), and it may be a key to insight and creativity.

To do all of this will require both time and money. Time to develop Parry's new features, to add emotions to its repertoire, to make it self-modifying, to make it a problem-solver and an original thinker, and time to test—with some version of the imitation game—debug, adjust to new linguistic and psychological discoveries, and test again. Money for the memory and information-handling capacity the new Parry will need as it grows. And both may be denied if people fear what Parry may become.

Would a perfected Parry be a tyrannical and oppressive god? A Harlie who wants to build a GOD? A Republican bugger? Or a counselor, warrior, planner, or artist? We must limit our thinking machines in the few ways we can if we are to prevent a stillbirth of fear. We must design them to think faster than ourselves, but not necessarily better; limit their access to information (and perhaps cripple their usefulness thereby) or to ways of acting directly on the world; or design into them some equivalent of Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics* to ensure their benevolence or, at least, their neutrality. The last is best, as the Good Doctor correctly saw, for only thus can we hope to enjoy all the benefits of this aspect of technology. Only thus can we have a trustworthy and almost omniscient adviser and problem-solver, conversationalist and companion as near as the nearest telephone or computer terminal. Only thus, as Dr. Colby foresaw, can we have a perfect training device for all who would deal with the mind, psychiatrists, counselors, therapists, and teachers. Only thus, perhaps, will we ever solve those problems of

*The Three Laws of Robotics: 1. A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm; 2. A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law; 3. A robot must protect its own existence, except where such protection conflicts with the First or Second Laws.

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politics and society that now seem too complex for mere human minds to grasp.

But enough of hyperbole. It may all come true, but hardly right away. A thinking machine able to learn and loaded with knowledge would still be immensely useful if it were not indistinguishable from a human being. It *would* make a wonderful training and teaching device. It *would* be able to advise on complex problems. And it *would* be able to converse. But its most important role would be as a tool for studying the mind-brain problem and the workings of what we call the mind. We know that a computer is not at all the same as a brain, neither in function nor in structure. But we think that the mind and a computer program may be the same in that they are both patterns, flows of information and instruction. And because a program that successfully simulates a phenomenon amounts to a theory, or a description, of that phenomenon, a true thinking machine must be a theory of the mind. If we can achieve that, we will have achieved our first real inkling of how the mind, and, in a holistic sense, the brain, works. ■

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Ravenshaw stood at the window and watched the rain. He thought that weather had no necessary correlation with the country of the mind. The rain blotted out San Diego harbor and marched in sheets down Broadway against the morning traffic, while he stood in a bone-dry stretch of *malpais.* Badlands. *Malpais del mente.* He was a lieutenant-colonel in the US Army on special duty as chief of Wide Blue Yonder, Inc. There had been no better job in the world for him. He resented the grubby country and dusty sky, the landscape of *malpais.*

You live in your head and make your own world, he told himself, so why stand around in the badlands of the mind?

Because General Craddock had phoned yesterday to set up a meeting in Texas that was sure to unlock a Pandora's box of troubles. And damn Copernicus! If Nell Rowley was the sun of his life, she should revolve around him instead of pursuing her own mysterious flight pattern. The outer office door opened behind his somber reflected face in the rain-slashed window.

She was hunched over with a key, a purse, an umbrella and a bunch of roses to manage. Her green raincoat was patterned with yellow eyes and smiles. She wore orange and yellow plaid pants, a ruffled shirt with little blue flowers and a lilac sweater jacket. She held a chair-back and took off her boots with delightful female contortions. She stepped into a pair of Bass moccasins. She looked at him with violet eyes. "Morning, Arleigh."

The phone rang. "Uh-huh," said Ravenshaw. It was Carl Minty, DDS, an unhappy man who made irregular thumping noises. "That's too bad, Doctor." Nell arranged the roses in a bowl while Ravenshaw listened with resigned patience. "OK. OK, keep in touch." That was the wrong thing to say. He winced and cradled the phone. It rang immediately.

"How go the wars?" General Craddock from Washington, DC.

Ravenshaw said he got a call from the dentist who thought he had a solvent for n-alkyl alpha cyanoacrylate monomers. "He spilled some on top of the toilet. The solvent didn't work." He was tired of Minty, a garrulous tub of a man,

Pandora is still remembered for opening a door that should have been kept closed. But she only worked in *one* space-time universe!

W. MACFARLANE

country of the mind

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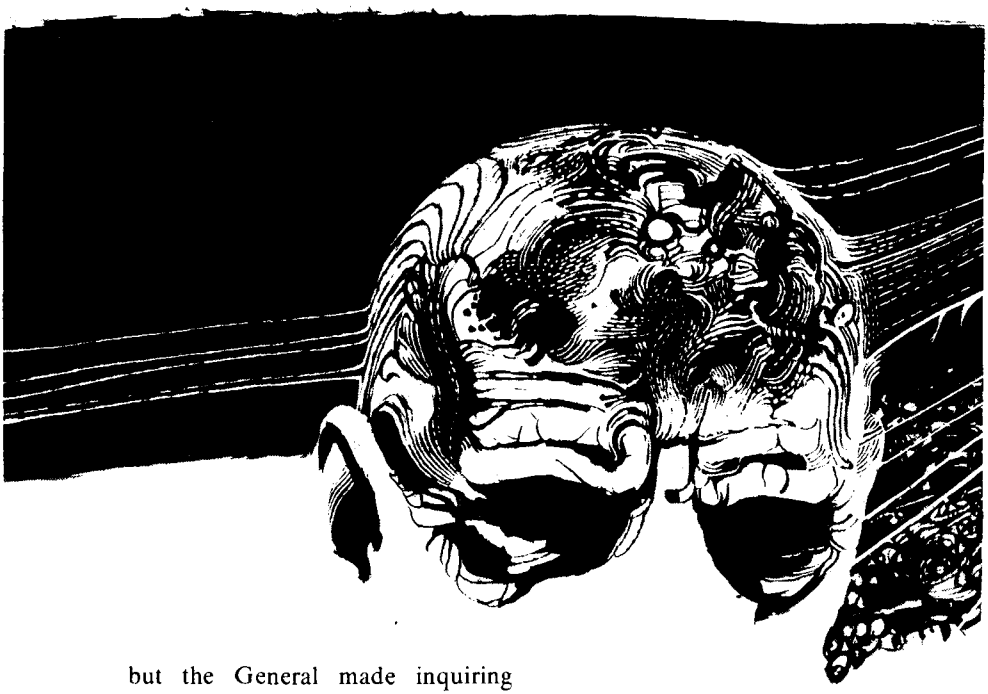

but the General made inquiring noises. "No, sir, too bad, not like Prince Albert. He got his hand stuck to the tank lid. He lifted it off and carried it to the phone. Don't suppose it weighs ten pounds."

"Methyl cyanoacrylate, Eastman 910?"

"No, sir. This medical glue is a close cousin, purified and not so toxic. They paint it on teeth for gingivitis, but they hope to glue liver together with it. It just about sticks oil to water, and even with no solvent, it's useful with reservations right now, like oil of garlic to

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kill mosquito larvae in a bathtub."

"Well, if you say so. Ravenshaw, I'm leaving now for San Antonio. I'll have a car meet you and Nell at the airport."

"Wait a minute, sir—" The phone was dead. Ravenshaw decided he was out of snychronization, behind, before or to one side of himself.

A woman bustled into the office carrying a shopping bag. She was pleasingly plump, a pretty pouter pigeon. Nell introduced her as Miss Lummell.

"Miz Lummell. My marital status has nothing to do with my business." She settled in the client's chair. "Now, how do I know you won't cheat?"

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He sat behind his desk and explained that Wide Blue Yonder was an external research and development agency for sixteen small companies. WBY provided no entrepreneurial seed money and made no charge for its services. If her idea or invention was technical in nature, she must sign a release.

"It's always a question of trust, Miz Lummell, buying a book or a hamburger or a house. So far, we've had one complaint. The man who threatened us with legal blackmail left San Diego in the company of Federal officers and now resides in Atlanta, Georgia. He'll keep the same address for three years if he behaves himself, otherwise longer. Sign the release here."

She searched his face with bright brown eyes and nodded. Her back was straight. How could she bustle sitting down? She opened her shopping bag and put the model on his desk. She explained the merits of an automatic, graduated flagpole with fervor. Full half-mast in memory of Carrie Chapman Catt for example, but at the death of a male chauvinist pig, one-tenth mast was plenty.

Ravenshaw refrained from comment on the classic symbolism of a flagpole. He suggested she build a prototype and conduct field tests, perhaps with a banner of her own devising. She expressed ideological discontent, but Ravenshaw did not call her a chauvinist gilt. He was offensive enough to open the door for her when she left. He walked back to the window.

"A question of trust." He was a glib clown, all right. Trust Nell? Trust Craddock? Here he stood, a soldier on active duty, ready to doubt love, mistrust the General, and sidestep orders originating from the highest authority. Why? Because he had a hunch this trip to Texas was a drain-the-swamp maneuver and he would sure as hell find himself up to the ass in alligators.

Nell rapped and announced Augustin Kreh.

Kreh had a long thin face and the millimeter-at-a-time mind that splits oak. He had worked out a method of enclosing a hologram in a credit card. Insert the card into a terminal slot and punch identification, and a computer would yell tilt or accept the charge. Ravenshaw phoned a company in Costa Mesa quietly doing its best to eliminate cash and checks. He arranged an appointment for Kreh. He had his doubts about the credit card age, money manipulation and the security of computers, but he had no fear of an open market for ideas and their measurement against current reality.

An earnest Hindu brought in a Happiness Index based on thirty-four factors in every daily paper and explained the correlations in scrupulous detail. Ravenshaw sent him over to a columnist on the San

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Diego *Union*, though an evaluation of yesterday's newspaper emotions seemed as useful as engraving dirty limericks on the head of a pin.

"So why is there no credibility gap with horoscopes?" he said to Nell, who was opening the mail.

"How do you question belief? Better try to push a square of Jello across sandpaper with a logical toothpick."

Her voice was cool and clear, there was nothing provocative about her. The clothes she wore were dreadful. Her violet eyes were calm. To hell with office decorum! He started toward her.

Harlow Bughstetter walked in. "Mr. Ravenshaw? And how are you today, sir?"

"Uphill every step of the way," said Ravenshaw.

Bughstetter was a bull of a man who browsed the lush pasture of vegetarianism and health food. He discoursed on the optimum alcoholic load for a geriatric tonic, the best way to suggest aphrodisiacal properties in carrot juice, and the latent public desire for such magic as chlorophyl chewing gum. Put it all together. The New England Medical Association had published the results of a little experiment. If you ate a spoonful of dry table sugar, it cured hiccups ninety-five percent of the time. Now, if a man were to package a spoonful of sugar colored yellow, and call it Golden Hiccure, and saturate the market—

Nell put her head in the door to say that Ravenshaw should not forget his luncheon appointment. The two men parted with expressions of mutual esteem. Nell said they had better leave for the airport when he had signed the letters. The Kelly girl was here and ready to office-sit.

"Bughstetter!" she complained as they walked down the gray marble corridor to the elevator. He said he enjoyed Phineas T. Barnum types. There was lemon in her honey voice. "And what is the mingy motto tattooed on your heart today, Mr. Ravenshaw?"

"*Caveat emptor.* Let the buyer beware—but a drowning man isn't going to comparison-shop if it's a nylon or a hemp rope you throw to him."

"You are red-hot at latitudinal association this morning."

"With you beside me."

How could she melt and stand so straight? As they stepped into the elevator, Ravenshaw felt he stood on solid ground for the first time that day.

They drove to Nell's apartment for her overnight bag and down to Lindbergh Field in a spirit of quiet amity, but aboard the plane she began to withdraw into her own thoughts. Ravenshaw looked at his watch and cursed time. Happytime was building cupboards for minutes in a house of hours with an out-of-square foundation. He reflected gloomily that such elaborate con-

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ceits went well with the beer cans and trash and cactus in *malpais del mente.*

General Craddock wore a pair of glasses with silvery, wire-wound earpieces and an ivory bar on top between tinted lenses. In a Stetson, tailored bush pants and jacket, he was saved from sporty outdoormanship only by his faded Royal Stuart shirt and dusty boots. "How nice you could come," he said.

"Nice to be here," said Ravenshaw. "You're looking well."

"You'll want to wash up after your trip, but first come and meet my friends."

"Any friends of yours are friends of mine," said Ravenshaw lugubriously. "What an interesting place you have here."

Nell said, "Two stand-up straight men."

They stood in front of a fortress adobe building in a red dirt clearing, two hours from San Antonio, eight miles from the last paved road, beyond two unobtrusive sentry posts, in the middle of a well-grown thorn thicket. The General had been inspecting an International Travelall when they arrived. It stood beside a pole with three floodlights.

Craddock led them through nail-studded doors to a hall, and into an enormous room with islands of furniture on the red tile floor. Tall casement windows looked out to the enclosed courtyard with a Mexican tile fountain in the middle. A stone fireplace had five pairs of longhorns stacked in formation above the adzed cedar mantel. Two long settees of black tufted horsehide faced each other in front of it. Two men turned from the mesquite root fire.

The tall intense youngster was Gideon Spencer. The other man was Cailey Oort. He was a package of solid amiability, the President's confidential scientific adviser, happy to meet Nell and Ravenshaw. He said, "General, time is always short. Would it be possible to get a quick demonstration of the phenomena before supper?" He smiled whimsically. "After all, an elephant is a highly speculative beast until you meet one." His easy manner was underlaid by sure, secondhand authority.

"Certainly," said Craddock. "It's a good idea to let gut reaction turn to intellectual acceptance before our tour tomorrow—Nell? Arleigh?"

Spencer said to Oort, "If it's all a misunderstanding, we could make our phone call and catch the Braniff at 11:25."

"It's easy to establish a fact," said the General. He took off his birdman glasses and seemed suddenly defenseless. "What to do about the ancient philosophical themes is not so easy: the matter of virtue, fundamental values, the nature of man and society." He put on a pair of horn-rims. "Let's go."

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The sun was down when they climbed into the Travelall, Nell between Ravenshaw and Craddock in the front seat, Oort and Spencer in the back. Ravenshaw said, "Fasten your seatbelts and stay in your seats, please." He started the engine and turned on the headlights. The General loosened a .30 caliber carbine in a sheath by his knee. A nighthawk swooped across the beams, the mesquite was lacy in fresh green leaf, closed cactus blossoms repeated the red of the soil. Ravenshaw said, "Are we ready?" He took Nell's hand.

They switched worlds.

The headlights bored into red dust, thick with heavy bodies in violent motion. The Travelall was hit, rocked on its springs and slammed again. A nightmare hulk smashed the grille and right fender. Another beast was forced on top by back pressure. Hooves scrabbled on the hood. Short hooked horns battered the windshield. Craddock shoved the muzzle of the carbine into the mouth and pulled the trigger. It was set on automatic. Nell found Ravenshaw's hand.

They were back in their own world.

The clip finished. The buffalo squealed plaintively, tossed its bloody, slobbering head and died. The single headlight picked out the lupine in bloom at the edge of the clearing. The engine idled easily. "You call them bluebonnets in Texas," said Ravenshaw. He sneezed in the fine red dust cloud. "End of demonstration." They tumbled out the left-hand doors. The right side of the Travelall was pounded shut. Dust eddied in the still evening air. Nell wept red furrows down her cheeks.

Spencer babbled, "Skeptic to convert in forty-five seconds! No unbelievers in buffalo herds—real evangelism—be-spewed, be-mired, be-blooded, I can testify—"

Oort stood and looked at the buffalo on the hood. He did not move. He was stunned. Craddock suggested the others get cleaned up. He and Ravenshaw would join them shortly. "You didn't fix that stampede to rub Oort's nose in the dust?" He polished his glasses on the tail of his shirt. "All right, then."

"Sir, I don't like this operation."

"Hill could cut out the loin. Very able staff here, cleared for top secret. Maybe a breakfast of buffalo steaks."

"This whole deal has goddam alarming implications."

"I know it. So I told the President. It's a can of worms that won't quit." He smiled wryly. "Suppose you could dehydrate electricity and store a thousand kilowatt hours in a milk-bottle? You'd disrupt the economy and raise hell generally—point I'm making is, we'd do it tomorrow if we could. Paranoia aside, no technology is suppressed."

"Bacteriological warfare?"

"No secret. And it may be harm-

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ful to the health, like poison gas and nuclear weaponry. You ever hear about the Pogue carburetor, or the tires that lasted for the life of the car, or the engine that runs on household chemicals, or seawater, or quartz dust? I've looked at them all. Fantasy and paranoia, Arleigh. You know, I think we ought to try the hump, too."

"Pogue carburetor?"

"One of dozens that gave eighty miles to the gallon. You bet."

"You've not answered my question, sir."

"No, I haven't. Let's get cleaned up."

"Yessir."

An Arabian Nights' city of bottles rose from the table between the two settees. Nell had gin and tonic, Ravenshaw mixed a martini in a tumbler with ice, Oort sipped Wild Turkey, Spencer had bourbon and water, the General poured Aberlour Glenlivet for himself. They talked about the funny things Texans do, the Washington climate and the short attention span of the media. Ravenshaw defended hysterical ecofreaks as a necessary gad to the unaware. Oort illustrated the impact of even a bad idea with the bum rap for cyclamates. Nell mentioned the "Natural History of Nonsense," and Spencer told a story from Isaac Asimov's joke book, which Craddock endorsed as the finest treatise ever printed in the field.

Because Oort preempted Nell's attention, Ravenshaw was free to study her face. Her lips were elegantly modeled, her nose long and straight to match the long planes for her face. Her lower lids were subtly off straight. Bone, cartilage and flesh are common materials and make an infinity of faces; the alternate worlds were no more improbable. Her violet eyes met his own. Her expression did not change and no one else noticed the trumpet blast that sintered the blood in his veins.

After a buffet supper, Oort and Spencer and the General went to the library. Ravenshaw looked at the fire. Nell picked out one-finger melodies on the old rectangular piano. Her singing voice was a soft Elizabethan drone, lost in the high beamed ceiling until he stood beside her:

"—I do so many things so ill
That I am pleased to love you well.

"Consummation's taken place
Though I have yet to touch your face;

"For in the country of my mind
Your face my true love's face I find."

She swung around on the piano seat. "Did you ever tell the General you can jump between worlds yourself?"

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"It was believe or burn, baby, burn. I've only done it three times. It was out of working hours." His words sounded foolish in his own ears. "Reticences are funny—Nell. Every couple establishes privacy patterns. This morning I didn't ask how you could walk to work in a toad-strangler rain and stay dry. Only a few drops like diamonds—" He caught himself. "And you never ask me about the Army. Because you think I murdered little golden people? Never mind. It's intent that counts. I am interested in everything you do and say. The way you look and smell, the very way you stand compels my attention."

"I did walk in another world—an old gentleman insisted on cutting me the roses," she said rapidly. "Oh, Arleigh—"

The General shut the library door behind him. "Orders," he said. "We make the run tomorrow. Then back to Washington for a personal report to the President. A debriefing and examination team will take over after that. You are to consider yourself a national resource, Miss Rowley."

Ravenshaw said in a carefully neutral voice, "Do you really think this is going to happen?"

"A pair of secret service men will meet us in San Antonio. We'll fly back in Air Force One." General Craddock pushed up his glasses and rubbed his eyes. "You know my job. I investigate the inexplicable. I deal with enigmas and possibilities that have not yet happened. So far, I've seen no issue crystal balls."

The next morning was warm in the sun and cool in the courtyard shadows. Ravenshaw walked the west side of the garden with a cup of coffee and an armadillo galumphed out of the shrubbery and scuttled across the lawn and through the back entry. "Your steak's ready, sir," said Hill, majordomo of the establishment, turning the meat on a charcoal grill.

General Craddock said that bringing back souvenirs must cease. He had not enjoyed burying the buffalo with decontaminants against possible other-world disease. While the others ate, he and Ravenshaw inspected the Travelall. The hood was mashed in, but a mechanic from an Engineer company at Ft. Sam said it was cosmetic damage and all essential systems were go. After the interment, the backhoe operator had pulled the fender away from the wheel. The Travelall was loaded with an Eskimo cooler of water, a wicker lunch hamper and a cold box filled with beer.

When the party was aboard, Ravenshaw said, "I'd like you to think of this Cornbinder as a life raft in the middle of the Pacific, so you'll know what it means to swim away from it. Figure on sharks. Please don't get lost."

"Right-ho," said Oort, who was bonhominous, rosy of cheek and

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nicely perfumed, "but is the choice random?" He asked Nell, "Is it Disneyland, Disneyworld, or Europe as Disneyland Continental?"

"No Mickey Mouse," she said. "Don't fool yourself, Mr. Oort, blood is salt and hot in any world." She wore faded Levis, a man's shirt and a peace-marcher's jacket—a heavy cotton coat from Tlaxcala.

Ravenshaw filled the sudden silence, "One old suggestion for standard operating procedure. If we meet natives, be cordial. Make friends fast." He started the engine. He took Nell's hand.

They made the transition.

No buffalo. The chaparral was gone. It was desert country. Scattered gray-green brush and featherhead grass clumps grew on the hills. Sand choked bushes and trailed behind agaves. A long pink dune marked the far horizon. Ravenshaw drove a few feet and stopped. "We'll make a cairn where we came in."

Spencer energetically found a dry mescal stalk and tied a blue bandanna to it. They piled rocks at the base between the tracks that began so abruptly in the dry soil. They were more at ease in this alien world when the job was done. Ravenshaw engaged the four-wheel drive and picked a way through the desolate terrain toward the distant sand dune.

"What if we came out in a rock?" said Spencer.

"That world's denied to us," said Ravenshaw. "Move over and try again."

"How can you shift three tons of Travelall?"

"Archimedes said he could move the world with a long enough lever and a place to stand. It's a stance in your head. You can move three tons with a flyswatter in any world: stack automobile batteries on top of each other—figure fifty pounds per vertical foot—you can topple a 120-foot column with bad breath."

Spencer persisted. "But how do you do it?"

Nell said, "How do you think? How do you remember? How do you learn to read? That's also a mysterious process. By what associational miracle does a child translate squiggles on a page to 'Moo moo, said the cow'?"

"Hang loose, Gid," said Oort, surprisingly. "Final answers are final in context only."

A clear stream ran in a rocky bed on the sand dune side of a wide valley. A coyote loped off when the Travelall lurched into the shallow water. They turned downstream and crossed a patch of gravel where silver-gray chipmunks skittered ahead like waterbugs. After fifty minutes of jolting travel, Ravenshaw stopped by a thicket of cane in a cienega and said comfort stations were to the right for the ladies and to the left for gentlemen. Spencer asked Nell to buy him a Dr. Pepper if the machine was on her side.

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"I keep expecting a bunch of Arabs on camels to crest on that sand dune," said Oort.

Spencer said, "I've been looking for Indians with parasols up on those rocks. Hot day."

Ravenshaw said to expect either one, and Craddock advised a prophylaxis against dehydration. Ravenshaw chugalugged a can of Jax and suggested they drink while he drove, and they continued down the valley. The canyon narrowed and turned, and opened to a long crooked lake, hot blue under the hot sun. One side lapped the rocks, the other was vivid green grass. Two arms of pink sand ran almost to the edge of the water, forming a deep amphitheater. The lake outlet was over rocks into a craggy canyon. There was no vehicular route beyond this point. Three white waterfowl paddled and burst into the air.

"Colonel, what's that thing?" said General Craddock. A twenty-foot post stood in the center of the pink sand bowl. "It looks like a California used-car lot without the cars."

A conical tent of ribbons was fastened to double rings at the top of the barber-striped pole and pegged away in a thirty-foot circle. The ribbons shimmered, brilliant against the sand. The only other artifact in sight was a black ladder at the base of a rippled dune. Ravenshaw turned on the grass beside the lake, to head back the way they had come. "I suppose we'd better go look."

They walked a hundred yards through blow sand to firm sand around the pole. The pegged ribbons twisted in the light air, rainbow silk in sophisticated colors of blue to green to yellow to orange and red and purple. Spencer walked through the ribbons to look at the thick pole, Oort snooped the circumference, the General went to look at the ladder.

Nell was troubled. "I remember—" she began. "Arleigh, let me take out a little insurance. I have something to tell you." She hesitated. "Whatever happens, 'The birthday of my life is come' "—she quoted Christina Rossetti in her high sweet voice—" 'My love is come to me.' "

Ravenshaw stood dumb. Heavy blood pounded in his ears. The dispassionate observer in him said, Look at the beads of sweat on her lip, her hair's a mess, women choose the goddamnedest times—

"Arabs!" shouted Oort.

Simultaneously, Spencer yelled, "Indians!"

Figures silhouetted against the intense sky. They began dropping into the bowl from the ends nearest the lake, cutting off retreat to the Travelall.

Oh, those golden girls! Those pink and lovely golden girls! Under a tall blue sky, they came running and plunging and dancing down the tawny pink dunes, hair stream-

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ing, diaphanous garments vivid as colored smoke in the sun. Pink sand spurted under their feet. A few tumbled and sprang up like acrobats to run again, all shapes and sizes converging on the ribboned pole.

"Is the choice of worlds random?" said Nell. "Arleigh, I remember—I have been here before—"

"In your nightie? Where do they come from?"

"California. Oh, I've never been *here*, but—" She was white. Her fingers locked on his wrist. "But I'm home."

"And all the ladies in shimmy shirts?"

Nell was exultant. "The fabled women of Mier!"

"*A-dios*," said Ravenshaw.

She said absently, "You'll be safe with me—"

"In a pig's valise!" He stepped away.

He switched worlds.

When he tried to remember later on, Ravenshaw was reasonably sure the sandy soil was covered with trees. He had no clear memory of walking through pines or oaks or mangoes. His mind was a stop-action photograph of pink dunes and women running down them, the men frozen in astonishment, and Nell Rowley lightning-struck by revelation. Today was pay-day for her. She had become a behavioral psychologist and joined General Craddock's investigation of inexplicable phenomena in an effort to understand her origins. The first eight years of her life were blanked by traumatic amnesia.

With Ravenshaw, her memory had returned in patchwork isolates, enough to establish a mode of transition to an infinity of worlds, separate, distinct and unique to themselves. Limited entry to the alternate worlds was possible by exotic technology, but as airplane flight compares to the flight of birds—and Nell had learned to fly.

As had Ravenshaw himself, to his own intense disquiet.

It's all very well to watch a magician pull a rabbit from a hat, but to reach into your own hat and feel ears wiggling, posed questions he did not want to meet. He had a deep mistrust of the ability to change worlds. It was the boyhood dream of omnipotence, and the implications were as tangled as a rattlesnake nest. He did not want to sort out rattlesnakes.

He changed back to the Mier world.

He crawled through bunch grass to the crest of the dune. Half the women were dancing around the pole, weaving a complex pattern. Most of the others were singing for the dancers, but a small group guarded the three men. Nell was speaking to an imperious woman with magpie white in her high black hair. Her attendants wore Nineteenth Century costumes of

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plum, gray and blue. The dancers closed on the pole like a subway crowd. The Dragon Lady spoke decisively and Nell stepped back.

When the singing reached a triumphant conclusion, faint in the open air to Ravenshaw's ears, a flying half-watermelon appeared over the dune and landed just away from the pole. The rounded hull was green and the interior rows of seats were pink. The ladder was put up the pole, the loose ends tied off, the rings split, and a rainbow cape was ceremonially draped over the Dragon Lady. She climbed to the deck of the ship and addressed the multitude. Then everyone swarmed aboard the flying watermelon. It rose silently into the air, transparent panels rising from the sides to meet in the middle. It picked up altitude in a westerly direction.

The Cornbinder looked like a discarded cast-iron toy on the green grass by the blue lake. Ravenshaw stood and brushed sand from his sweat-soaked shirt. He spat cotton. He walked down the dune and across the loose sand to the wagon. He washed his mouth with water from the cooler, drank a can of Pearl and threw the empty toward the striped maypole.

Without smiling he checked the "secret" compartment of his wallet for the two fifties he kept as mad money. He drank another can of beer, started the engine and drove upstream. He passed the valley that led to the cairn and the adobe. He was not about to explain to anyone in San Antonio how he had misplaced a general officer, a Presidential confidant and his assistant, and a palomino-headed psychologist. He stopped by a cottonwood.

He switched worlds.

He was forty feet from a farm road intersecting a highway half a mile off. It turned out to be 290 and he was two hours from Austin, the state capital. He found the airport, waited an hour and fell asleep in the plane over west Texas. He woke with the *Fasten Your Seatbelt* light on. The plane landed at Lindbergh Field while Ravenshaw was still considering the full-color mental picture of himself tall in the saddle, riding to the rescue, bugles sounding offscreen, the consummate horseman who had made one little mistake: he mounted the horse backwards and galloped over the West-that-never-was like a whiffle-diffle bird, who flies tail first because it doesn't give a damn where it's going and is interested only in were it's been.

He was grubby of mind and body. Even his rebuilt 1954 Mercury did not cheer him up. It started instantly. It had a 390-cubic-inch engine, disc brakes around, special suspension, Michelin racing tires and had clocked 137 on the lakes. "No goddam question," he said savagely as he drove away from the toll booth, "I am a hummer from Hummersville." He was

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past the sting of juvenile self contempt and did the best he could do, which was no consolation in his miserable, worrisome life, though it was some kind of comment on psychologists and the top percentile where their evaluation put him.

His apartment was cold and stuffy. He methodically took a shower, changed to ankle boots, suntans, a cableknit sweater and a short corduroy coat with the glazed cloth outside. He was physically warm when he drove through the drizzle to a bar and grill in Hillcrest. The place was busy with quick-drink-before-mama patrons, but Viktor nodded when he pointed to the twenty-pound roast over charcoal, and brought him two barbeque beef sandwiches on crusty rolls with double Kosher dills and a schooner of Olympia.

He drove up Mission Valley in a downpour, turned off on Ward Road and again on Friars Road. He parked in front of Mission San Diego de Alcala. He walked up the hill behind the mission. Across the valley the concrete rivers ran taillight red and headlight yellow. The shopping malls loomed in the rain like underwater wonderlands. His dichotomous heart exulted at alabaster cities, at once ridiculous and magnificent.

He turned to the Mier world.

The twilight was clear. A horse whickered. The houses above the flood plain were mixed, cobble cottages, New England saltboxes, shingled bungalows and a long pillared building as time-indifferent as Minos' palace at Knossos. There were crops on the bottomland. The mission complex was larger than in his own world. A woman shouted a musical "hoo-ahoo" to call children home. The air smelled of manure and woodsmoke. "Pastoral," said Ravenshaw.

He walked down the hill and around the corner of an outbuilding into a small herd of cows, udders swinging as they hurried toward night pasture, driven by a small girl with a long willow whip. She stopped immediately, arched her back and screamed. The cows lumbered on and fell into a walk. "Good evening, Mister," she said, and screamed again. Two women ran around a corner with weapons at port. "Good night, Mister," said the girl and followed her cows in the gathering dusk.

The guns had inset dials in the stock and short barrels with longitudinal black fins. Ravenshaw did not argue when they herded him along a cobbled alley to an isolated adobe building. It was bright inside with thin illumination strips running up the walls and across the ceiling. The guards were stolid, their long hair bagged in loose, billed caps. Their uniforms were plum purple jackets with gold frogging and dark green bloomers down to their high laced boots. The woman behind the desk was a different brand of cookie, anachronis-

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tic as the screen and controls of the crackle-finish cabinet against the adobe wall. Her eyes were topaz and impatient. Her hair was short raw-gold copper.

"You're wet," she said. "It's not raining. Who are you? How'd you get here?" She wore a rose-colored serge gym uniform with pleated bloomers below her knees and pink wool socks. Her appearance was attractive, her manner was not. "Speak up, man, don't waste my time!"

"You're wasting mine, Gertrude."

"Tie him up," she said to the guards. "You obnox me, man. Unqualmatical? I'll hold you for transport to Examination and Disposal. You'll beg to tell us the name of your grandmother's cat before we're done—"

"Puss." Ravenshaw watched the guard hobble his ankles.

"And you will also tell us how you got here, beginning with your first cradle memory." She stepped toward him. The guard tied his wrists in front with a square knot and turned him to face the wall. He felt a hand on his shoulder.

At her volition, they switched worlds.

It was dark night. He stood in a walled enclosure with an interrupted band of dim light at the top. The air was tropical, heavy with the scent of teeming vegetation. The stars looked wet. He turned in time to see her disappear. She did not linger like the smile on the Chesire cat, not go in a snap of fingers. She vanished as a marble rolls over the edge of a table, quietly and without fuss.

"Hold out your hands, Ravenshaw," said General Craddock. "I'll untie you. That rope tastes rotten. What's a nice boy like you doing in a place like this?"

"Where am I?" said Ravenshaw wearily. "Just lucky, I guess. Let's see now—General Craddock, I presume? Fancy meeting you here. What the hell's making the racket?"

"Crocodiles big as sewer pipes, the kind that ate the dinosaurs. I've had to keep close to the shop for the past few years, Arleigh. It's nice to be out in the field. Isn't that a wild noise they make? Sort of a gronking bellow, like Paul Bunyan's ox's mother in heat."

"Six, seven, eight, nine, ten. Sometimes I think I'm the only sober man in the world. Let's start again. What happened?"

"Oh, I think this world's built different. It never had the upthrusts and the Colorado still comes out at San Diego bay."

"Eight, nine, ten. Where's Nell?"

"Well, when that pink and green soup tureen landed at San Diego to let off the local representatives, I eased over the side and dropped down. I dodged around and finally crawled under a church pew. I had a damn cold nap about the middle

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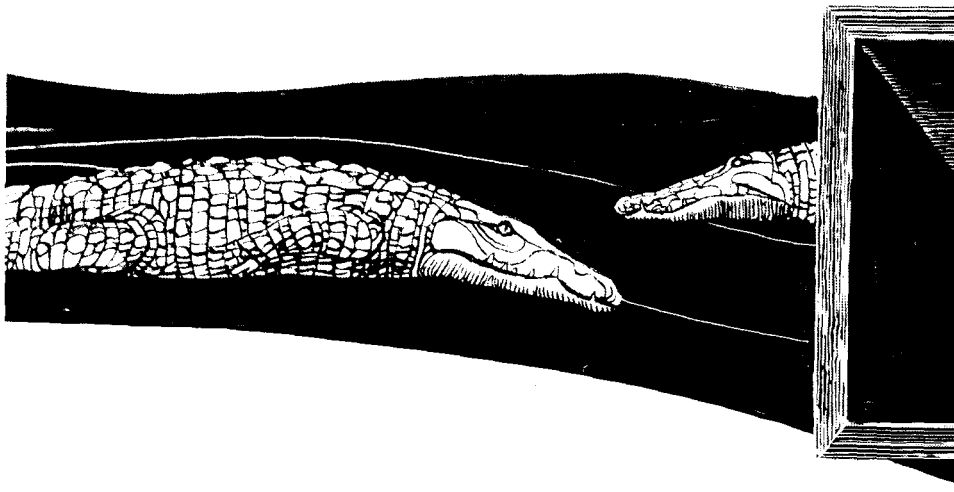

row. Then I got up and turned a corner and walked into a lady wrestler. She weighed 220 and had more grip than a pipe vise. So they chunked me in here an hour before sunset." The General sounded pleased as a boy. "Did I ever tell you about the uncle who sent me an alligator from Florida when I was a kid—about twelve inches long—the alligator, I mean—"

"Goddamit, Bill!"

Standing in a square stone box with crocodiles gronking in the swamps overwhelmed Ravenshaw with claustrophobia. He was sweating. He despised the tropics. He had been doing dumb things all day long and it had been a long day. He said bitterly, "Spare me your goddam juvenile reminiscences!"

"Second childhood show-and-tell?"

Ravenshaw grinned reluctantly. They were laughing together when Gertrude appeared. She switched them both back to the Mier world. Ravenshaw blinked in the light and felt better, even when they were escorted outside and prodded into an elongated oval craft, half glass, half hull. The rear compartment had rows of facing seats. The guard told them to hold up their hands. The wide chair arms squeezed and locked around them. She closed the door, the light went out and the ship lifted.

"Scarce resource is modern transportation," said Craddock. "I've seen only dirt roads and these flying things. What d'you think we should do now?" He answered his own question. "Play a waiting game, hah? So how do we get hold

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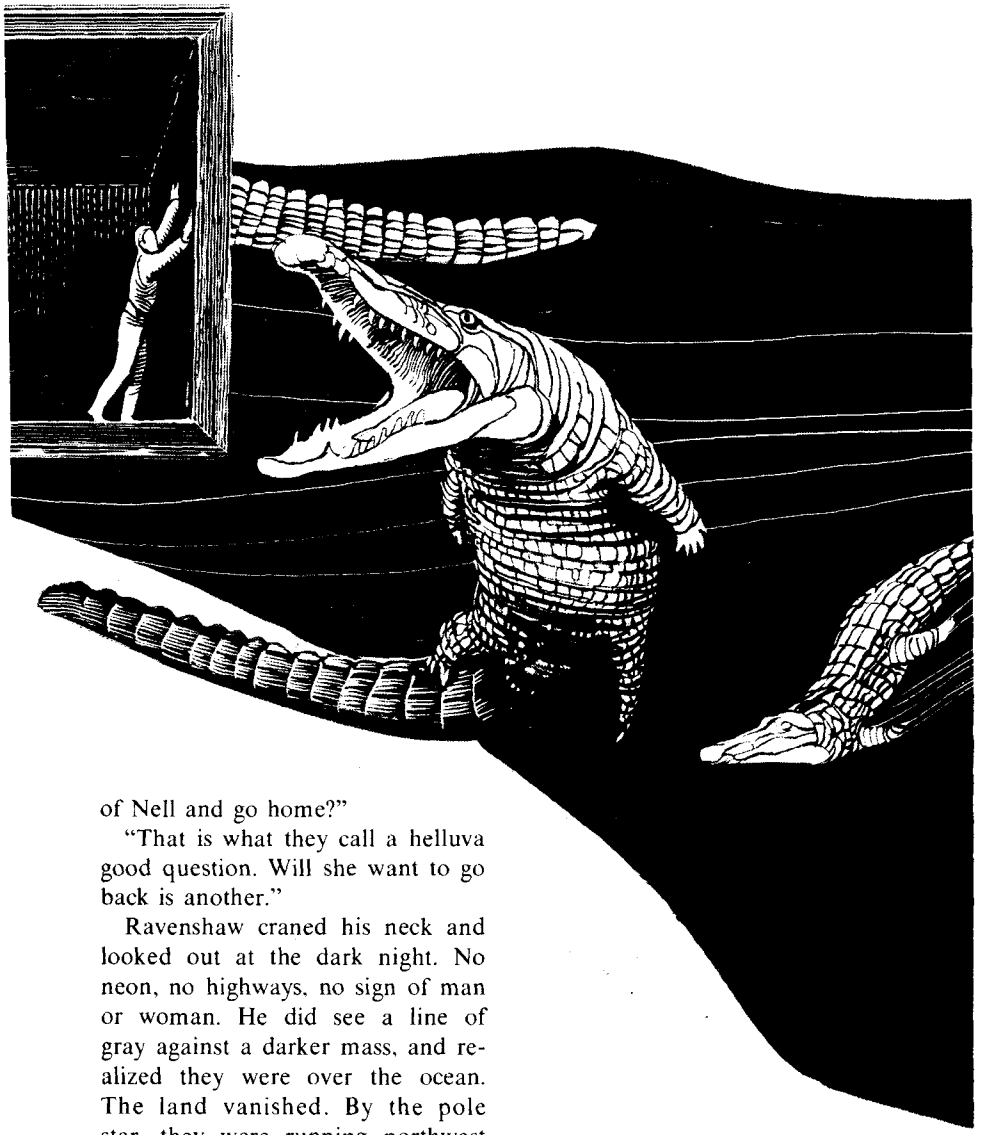

of Nell and go home?"

"That is what they call a helluva good question. Will she want to go back is another."

Ravenshaw craned his neck and looked out at the dark night. No neon, no highways, no sign of man or woman. He did see a line of gray against a darker mass, and realized they were over the ocean. The land vanished. By the pole star, they were running northwest over an empty sea. Had they switched to some alternate ocean world simply to avoid the coast

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mountains? Why not? There was no twang, no queasy feeling of being turned inside-out when the transition was made. It happened silently as water-witching. Would Nell return to the real world—his world? "I've got no idea," he said aloud.

"Those were *nice* crocodiles," said the General.

An hour later the semi-transparent potato slowed down, banked and stopped. Gray Goat Island was limned by starlight in San Francisco bay with the Golden Gate beyond. The ship settled like an elevator. They landed and Ravenshaw had a moment of *déjà vu* until he remembered the photograph he'd seen of the University of California taken around the turn of the century. "I think those are North and South Halls, and the one with the mansard roof is Bacon Hall, which is the library—or was—or might have been—" He stopped in confusion as the door opened.

Gertrude freed them from the chairs. A guard in bloomers followed with her fluted gun. They were led up stairs to an echoing hall and down a corridor to a large corner room. The General was put in a folding chair by the wall. Ravenshaw was seated at the focus of a long, curved table. The chair hugged his shoulders and folded around his chest and thighs. Tall windows were draped with net and looped with lace curtains. Cold light bands ran in arabesques between the windows. The ceiling was giddy with painted cupids who had musical instruments and bare behinds; one with an especially seraphic smile reminded him of Loose Wire Pedersen, nutty as a fruitcake, a soldier he had known who marched to an offbeat different drummer.

Seven women filed into the room. They wore rose and gray gowns. A freeze-dried witch sat at the center and nodded her head. Gertrude said that Ravenshaw had appeared from another world as they saw him now, but wet with rain. He was not one of the party from the Revelation Site in Texas. The badger-faced man by the wall was of that group, the one who had escaped and been recaptured. "Then take him away," said the witch.

The General said, "Keep your dauber up, Ravenshaw! The best of British luck!" and the guard took him out of the room.

A large blonde woman looked soulfully at Ravenshaw and said, "Have you fed him, poor thing?" She had golden ringlets and an outstanding bosom, which she rested on the table top. She smiled. She was his friend.

"Can he explain his depraved conduct?" said a redhead at the other end of the arc. Her eyes were angry black in a creamy, hollow-cheeked face. She did not believe in coddling criminals. She was not his friend.

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"Answer the questions or it will be the worse for you," said the old woman in the middle of the arc. She reminded Ravenshaw of Ayesha after her skinnydip in the flames of Life. Her voice was a rustling whisper, very clear. "Where do you come from?"

"Duh," said Ravenshaw. "I dunno."

Gertrude slapped him over the head with a rubber ruler full of needles. "Oh, don't beat him," said Blondie, but her prominent blue eyes glittered. "Harder," said Red, and she meant it.

"I forget," said Ravenshaw.

Gertrude belted him again, not hard. The needles were short but they bit. They had a real sting. Ravenshaw followed the example of Loose Wire Pedersen. "It wassen me. It musta been somebunny else. I forget. I dunno."

Whap. The questions continued. Who, what, when, where, why? *Whap.* He began to whine. "I dunno nuffin." He divorced himself from the scalp massage. The parquetry was handsomely inlaid. He suddenly had the answer to a small, nagging peculiarity: the chair legs were at least an inch shorter in the Mier world. Whap. The tables should be lower, and cupboards, and work areas. What else for women—were the chair seats wider? *Whap.*

How ingenious a questioning device, derived from a hairbrush? Or sitting in a summer dress on a horsehair-stuffed sofa? The polish on the floor was first class—except for those jeweled red specks—what was he doing here?

What, where, when and *whap!*

"Nobody can be so stupid," said enemy Red.

"He'll tell me, poor dear," said friend Blondie, "because honey catches more bees than bears." She sounded nicey-nice but made no sense. He was not tracking too well himself. His scalp expanded and contracted. Name, rank and telephone number. Some kind of liquid squirmed down his face. *Whap-whap.* He could not remember why he was here—when he could be elsewhere—it had something to do with protecting Nell. *Whap.* Like a needled drum to prick prunes before drying. This should be enough, oh this should do it. *Whappity-whap.* He sagged against the restraints. Tongue out? Tongue in. No artistic excess.

"The weaker sex," said Red disgustedly.

"Put him in the holding room," said Ayesha. Her voice was a snake's voice crawling over a coir mat. The chair moved on rollers. His head dangled. Was this the queen of hangovers with inch-high jackhammers outside rather than inside? He was trundled down a corridor into a small room open to the sun, he thought muzzily, judging from the light intensity. Oh sure, he thought, the well-after-midnight sun.

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The chair relaxed its grip. He was lifted to his feet. When the support at his elbows vanished, he collapsed like an unstuffed scarecrow, ankles, knees, hips—he was Jacob's own ladder—unhinged at shoulders, wrists and finger joints. Footsteps went away. A door shut. With dogged effort, he focused his eyes.

The ceiling was solid with light. He began the job of articulation like a puppeteer in mittens. Anklebone connected to the knee-bone, kneebone connected to the thighbone. Gonna rise again, he told himself, them bones—them bones, and against the drag of gravity, he sat up.

Monsters watched him.

They sat in lines to stare. They were red painted, smeared, striped, splashed and speckled. "We have met the enemy and he is ours," said Ravenshaw, but not a sound came from his lips. He tried more urgently. "We have met the enemy and he is us." Mumble-mumble-mumble. He grinned horribly. "I have met the enemy and he is me."

The wall of mirrors grinned back.

One section opened. Nell Rowley stood in the entry between two baggy-pants guards. She wrenched free and ran to him.

Infinite Nells fell to their knees, all wearing blazing angry faces and ribbons around their necks.

"Have they hurt you, Arleigh?" she demanded.

"Only when I laugh. Tongue thick as a flannelcake. "Cosmetic damage. Shall we bug out?"

She clutched the ribbon, a metallic yellow dogcollar around her neck. "Desynchronizer band. I can't move." She whispered fiercely, "Why did you stay?" Her breath on his ear comforted him. "Go yourself, right now!"

"Don't want to queer your deal. Go no way, without you."

When the endless line of guards hauled her up, he struggled to his feet and followed, shambling from wall to wall down the corridor like a bug dipped in brown-red ink. He clung to the door of the inquisition room. The seven women stared and three licked their lips. With total confidence, he stepped forward to blast them where they sat. He stumbled on the water-smooth parquetry and measured his length on the floor.

He was the invulnerable man. He could always run away. Nobody could touch him. He silently lectured the infinite Ravenshaws he had seen in the mirrored room, "OK, gentlemen, this is a demonstration of an obvious fact. We are prisoners in the human form. Pay attention, you might learn something. We are locked into ourselves. We are chained by our own preconceptions. I suckered into the needle-whipping because I bought the group premise. My role was to sit there and take it. Old prune-

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head. How dumb can you get?"

He opened his eyes and returned to the outside world. He was in the folding chair by the wall. Nell sat at the focus of the hard-faced women. Ayesha was on her feet.

She was a pink blotch of virulence. She pointed a crooked forefinger at Nell. "—and finally, you exposed our world to overage males. Ignorance is no defense. You will be caged in degradation with your half-wit paramour. You will be removed to the capital for execution of this judgment. Morality and righteousness must not be transgressed. Take them away."

"Here we go again," he told the Ravenshaws, "pillar to post, just a goddam junebug playing Ping-Pong ball." His knees had been badly restrung but he could walk between the two guards, following Nell down the corridor and steps to a peculiar wrought-iron construction sitting on the grass.

There was enough light spill to see that the cage was built with ponderous fancy. The bars bent to the center, six feet above the floor grid, and flared out like pineapple leaves from the carrier ring. They stooped to enter the low door and a guard latched it shut. A woman moved ten feet off the ground with her foot in a heavy cargo hook. She stepped onto the cage top, engaged the hook and climbed down. They rose slowly into the late night sky, hung on fifty feet of chain below a flying barge.

Nell was in his arms. She was trembling. He opened his coat to fold her in. "How do these things fly?" he asked to distract her. The top of her head came to his nose. She was a tall woman. She tipped her head back and he held her tight.

"As a pendulum from the center of gravity. The length of the arm and intensity are variable. From another world, of course. The Mier trade for them. Arleigh, how do you feel?"

"I feel great. Can I take off that damn collar?"

"If you can generate a 40-kmHz carrier and a—"

"Whaat?" He held her away from him. "Easy, now—"

"—a 40-kilo-mega-Hertz carrier with a one-kilo-Hertz square wave in one-millisecond pulses at a PRF—pulse recurrence frequency—of 20 pps. They told me. I memorized it."

"Well, not right now. How about bolt cutters? Hacksaw? Asbestos sheet and torch?"

Her voice was bleak. "Cut this toroid coil and the surge massively disrupts the electrical balance of brain cells. Now it only stops my transitional ability. Body heat powered. I feel self-betrayed. I am mutilated."

He considered the problem. "Can I jump us both back?"

"The collar fixes me to whatever world. I am prisoner in whatever world. And if it didn't, you want to

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jump us into the middle of the air? Oh, but my peers are subtle women. They told me how to take it off to give me hope, the hope of being in an advanced world long enough to explain–against an unknown transition time–" She shuddered uncontrollably. "Hope?"

The steady wind was piercing cold. He sat on the floor of the cage with his back to the air flow and pulled Nell down in front of him toboggan fashion. She was tense and trembling. She was hagridden by her thoughts. Encourage her to talk it out.

"When your memory came back, did you remember everything?"

"Oh, yes. You can't imagine how strange it is to suddenly have mint-fresh seven-year-old eyes. Children have greater recall because they have less gross data. I am Catherine Farr, Catherine with a C, and my mother was Hunter 223 Prudence Farr. Only one of two hundred thousand women can learn transition. I lived with my Aunt Gracious on our farm above Little Bear Creek, I remember my doll Elinor, the horses Jessie and Moon, Sunshine the cat–a full and busy life–"

Her hair whipped his face. He had her in his arms and he was not altogether frozen. He grinned in the dark at his contentment.

She told him about Rose Blossom Mier and the Mier world, the world where the last native male birth was in 1830. The suppression of Y chromosomes occurred only in humans. The current theories included movement into a patch of triggering stellar cloud, congruity with another dimension and cross-continuum radiation leakage, and wave generators mounted by an alternate world interested in experimental demography. In 1830, it was considered to be God's anger at male wickedness.

Rose Blossom Mier introduced the first young man in 1861. Her parents were original shareholders at Brook Farm. She was born in 1828. The central Phalanstery did not burn in her world and it was not until 1860 that "truth, justice and order" failed in the general social deterioration. She left Massachusetts and made her way south and west in a Conestoga wagon with a small group of like-minded women, searching for stability in the wilderness and buoyed by the hope of establishing a retreat of quietude on the Pacific slope.

Suisun Bay lay below them. They were heading northeast. She was finding emotional distance by talking. He did not interrupt.

The covered wagon was attacked by Indian women out of San Antonio and the little band of sisters fought off the war party, were driven from the trail and bogged down in the pink sand dunes. In a transcendental agony at her situation and that of humanity, Rose Blossom Mier slipped between

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worlds. She returned bewildered to her own world to find her companions slain and the wagon burned. She buried her dead and continued to California through a variety of worlds and experiences. She organized Fourieristic phalanxes on the mission sites, from monies accumulated by selling men she kidnapped from other worlds. Only girls were born in the Mier world. The last native man died in 1915.

Ravenshaw said gently, "Nell, I like Cathy with a C. But what happens now? Where are we going?"

"In the old traditional style to Sacramento for punishment."

"The door's only latched. I can get out--"

"No, Arleigh! You're hurt!"

"Sam, you made the scalp too tight is all. Look, you've spoiled me for all other women in all the worlds. We'll get out of this together or we won't, together." He wrapped his coat around her. "Don't go away."

He swung himself outside and climbed to the top of the cage with fingers wooden from cold. He stood on the flattened and sharpened inner pineapple spikes and looked up at the barge. The chain hung in a catenary curve about fifteen degrees off plumb, from a hole between lengthwise double doors. They should open inward. Fifty easy feet in the pre-dawn light, and Sacramento not far away. He waved to Nell, her face pale through the bars, and began to hitch himself up hand over hand, getting a fair grip between his knees on the knobby chain.

And after he got inside the scow? Make the driver land the thing. Don't . . . plan . . . too far . . . ahead. He stopped when he had climbed two-thirds of the way, because he ripped the heel of his hand on a burred link of the hand-forged chain. Yolo Basin was lush green below. The constant wind drove his body into the chain. Up and at 'em.

There was no more chain. It was not easy to hoist himself high enough to push against the doors with his bleeding hand, to force himself downward. He grabbed the chain with both hands and tried to set both insteps on the shoulder of a link. No go. With agonizing care, he pulled himself up enough to push with his head, and turned dizzy as a dancing bear. His head began to swell and diminish like a child blowing and inhaling on a full balloon. He could always slide down. Down and down to the pineapple spikes?

He clung desperately with one hand and got his knife from his pocket. He slipped it through a link knee-high. An inch projected on either side. No missteps now--no mizteps--you male chauvinist pig--and he had both feet on it by a small miracle. With something to push against, he found both doors were fastened on the inside. Put a shoulder ve-ry care-fully to the

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join, head skewed. Push. The doors opened. He straightened up and looked at a geared hand winch with a ratchet lock.

"Welcome aboard, man," said Gertrude in her rose gym suit. "Climb on up—or not." She stood well away from the opening, the copper-head cookie from San Diego. He pulled himself up until he could grip the side of the reel and sprawl to the deck away from the void. The hull was filled with barrels and crates and bales of cargo. He pushed against the deck—just call him old canvas-back—and sat up, leaning against a box. A bloomered guard stood to one side. "You demonstrate the male," said Gertrude with distaste, "all muscle and no brain."

"No forehead. I'll grow a purple goatee," said Ravenshaw.

"You are a lost cause. Why do you quarrel with Mother's will? It was all foreseen three hundred years ago by a poet named Henry King:

'The Wind Blows out, the Bubble dies;
The Spring entombed in Autumn lies;
The Dew dries up; the Starre is shot;
The Flight is past—and Man forgot.'

Why not climb on Mother's lap and ask forgiveness?"

"Go parthenogenesis yourself!"

"Quarter power, one-half second," Gertrude called to the guard, who twiddled with the gun and shot him.

He had no voluntary muscular control. This particular alien gun afflicted him with ants crawling over his entire skin surface. He was limp as a wet sock but millions of squirming nerve endings kept him awake.

Visual sense returned. He could focus his eyes to look at the riveted bars of the cage. Audio plugged in, which was no blessing. A woman with a harsh voice was reading an indictment. She said that Catherine Farr was a warped and perverted being. "Sugar and spice and everything nice," Ravenshaw whispered as vocal warmed up. Nell shook him like gravel from a dump truck and he fell to compaction within his skin. Take an intelligent interest, he told himself.

He was back in the cage with Nell. That part was fine. But the cage was in the middle of an arena covered with flagstone, with moss in bloom between the flags—teeny-tiny white star blossoms. An instrument console stood halfway to a ring of roses, delicate single flowers on briery vines against a six-foot rock wall. There were four terraces up from the flags to a split redwood pergola that circled the top, overgrown with enormous pink cabbage roses. All levels rioted with roses behind the groups of

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women looking down at the cage.

So what did he do, the cynosure of all eyes? He sneezed. Nell had been standing calm and pale as Joan of Arc before the match hit the gasoline. She looked down at him sadly. He put his finger under his nose and sneezed again. She smiled. He staggered to his feet in paroxysmal spasms. He grabbed the bars and sneezed and sneezed. He wiped his nose on his sleeve. There was a hum of indignation. He elaborately wiped his nose from shoulder to wrist, and turned to Nell. She was leaning back against the bars, grinning at him. "*Gesundheit,*" she said. He sneezed again.

"Degenerate daughter!" said the Dragon Lady. She was dressed in American Beauty red, her nose was pale with anger, her hair black with a streak of white. Nell deliberately opened her arms to Ravenshaw and they brazenly embraced. Over her shoulder, he saw the cold Dragon Lady turn cryogenic. She slashed her arm through the air. "Execute!"

The woman at the console pulled a switch.

The cage was gone. They stood in deep spring grass on a knoll. The Sacramento ran beyond the willows at the bottom of the hill. The miasmatic scent of roses was blown away in the morning wind. Nell seemed content to stand forever.

"What's so bad about this?" said Ravenshaw.

"Hold my hand and don't let go. Let's sit down—wait, you're a dreadful mess. We'll wash in the river." They walked across the slope to a thinner screen of trees. A new sandbar had been laid down. Ankle high weeds were plush green near the shore, and he swung her to him.

"Stinging nettles." His shoulder muscles creaked when he picked her up and started through them. She was a very solid woman and the romantic front-carry was mechanically disadvantageous—and she knew it.

"I could go on like this forever," she said dreamily.

"Like hell—" he began, and dropped her feet, but they never touched the sand.

They were transposed to another world.

Down and down into brown roily water. She clutched his hand and they kicked and paddled up together. Ravenshaw was caught by clutching tentacles and held. Nell was above him. She pulled savagely and the twisted fingers loosened. His lungs heaved at the surface. He was weak as a mouse in a well. Someone turned a hose in his face. His fumbling hand was guided to a grip. It was raining buckets. Nell gulped air and then she fastened her lips to his. The kiss of life. Air went into his lungs. She broke away spluttering and he grabbed her shoulder.

"Sex-mad maniac! Thought you

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were drowning—you cop a feel!"

He laughed so hard his head went under and he surfaced choking and gagging. When he could see and hear again, she was giggling. Her palomino hair was plastered to her head. Stripped to the bone, she was beauty bare.

In the middle of a mile-wide Sacramento in flood, tangled in the broken roots of a cottonwood, garrulous, smart-ass Arleigh Ravenshaw found himself irrevocably in a new country of the mind. He never anticipated such a commitment. It happened. It was. All the words of the poets could only approach the central nexus and stop, definition from 360 degrees, the mystery established and unapproachable. "Well, now," he said softly.

"Are you hurt?"

He shook his head.

"You look funny." She was worried.

He nodded.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Forget any plans without me for the rest of your life."

"Oh." She blushed in the rain. "I had to find out about the Mier world, do you understand?" she said anxiously.

He nodded.

"All right."

They climbed through the roots to the rough trunk of the cottonwood. Rain hissed into the water. He sat against a pair of branches and she sat on his lap. He said, "Now tell me what the hell is going on."

"I think we're being in love. Oh, I know what you mean—but it's business and pleasure together now, inseparable." She sighed. "You need a shave." He shook her. "Well, it's really a terrifying punishment, keyed to this toroid around my neck. The desynchronization prevents me from changing worlds myself, but the disrupter in the arena, that control panel, does it at random time intervals. That's what happened, what is happening."

"Five minutes here, ten minutes there?"

"An hour or a day, then zap, zap, zap."

"Discontinuity. Turn you crazy as a scalded cat."

"Night or day, eating or going potty, walking or sitting—"

"If you can't gather the environment, when you ride a car—"

"Away you go, all by yourself, at sixty miles an hour."

Ravenshaw shook with the cold. "Be nice to change now—to a sunny world—Nell, how come I tag along with you? What theory accounts for that?"

For an answer, she pulled his head down and kissed him. It was a great deal warmer. He opened his eyes to see the sunsheen on her hair. He shifted her to block the blinding reflection from his eyes. She murmured, "Changed worlds?" and he said, "Mm-hmm."

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"Hey, gang, you're all wet!" said a voice.

Three boys were on bicycles on a path. Ravenshaw and Nell were sitting waist deep in warm water. "Go 'way," said Nell languidly. "Beat it," said Ravenshaw, and when he looked up again, boys, bicycles and river were gone. They sat in a field of California poppies, green and all the colors of orange.

"New ball game," said Ravenshaw.

She agreed. "The whole world has changed." She got to her feet and pulled him up. "Do you remember in Nevada when I was lost? I went through a dozen worlds like a stone skipping on water. Then I stopped. And I thought. And I homed on you. You can dial with your eyes shut—you know—or you can fix a world from prior knowledge. 'The way you look and smell, the very way you stand compels my attention.' I was listening all right. Arleigh, this man/woman transposition ability may have happened infinitely often before, but not in our frame of reference. New ball game."

He blinked his eyes in the sun. "Do you think *husband* is a wodgey word, and *wife* kind of shrill?"

Nell said, "How come you're not starving to death?"

"I am, but I've starved before. How come you're not indignant about indignities I can't help?"

"I don't know any better. I'm hopelessly in love."

"Likewise. And we're busily dripping dry—"

"Togetherness—"

The worlds shifted.

They stood in the middle of a highway. A tall narrow car with a German silver radiator shell was rolling down on them. Ravenshaw flung Nell to the side of the road and leaped too late. He saw an expression of fright on the driver's face as the brakes howled, the car slid sideways, the fender caught him and threw him up, up and away.

Ravenshaw woke with a feeling of integrity and contentment. It had to be Christmas morning and all the wonders of the world were waiting. He opened his eyes. It was a high ceiling, tongue and groove, painted white. A meadowlark called outside. He drowsed momentarily. Obligations were resolved, he loved Nell Rowley and she—

He sat up. Five hundred Chinese had needles stuck in him. The pain was so acute the rivers of adrenaline faltered and he fell back. He threw off the sheet and swung his feet over the side of the high bed. He was in a hospital ward, bright morning outside. Faces turned to him. A nurse in a winged white cap clip-clopped briskly down the aisle.

"Now-now," she said. "Lie down. You're perfectly all right. Contusions, abrasions and no concussion, Dr. Stebbins said, and ex-

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haustion. Lie down and rest—"

"Where's Nell?"

"No one else was hurt in your accident—"

"Where are my clothes?" He stood on the floor. It moved under him. He braced his legs. The nurse clucked reprovingly and put her hands on his shoulders. He swept her away. She bounced when she sat on the floor, ankles exposed, her cap askew.

Ravenshaw could not catch his breath. He gripped the neck of his frock and ripped it down. He was bandaged from armpit to the bottom of his rib cage. "Goddam," he said, and vanished.

He stood in the middle of a classroom filled with girls. The teacher squealed. Shock hit the room. He was gone.

He stood on a rug to one side of a long table with eight men around it. "Stand up," he shouted. He walked around the table to the man nearest his size and hit him on the jaw. He slumped. Ravenshaw grabbed his shirt-front and they both disappeared.

A woman lay naked on a wide bed. She rolled over and watched Ravenshaw strip the man he'd brought with him. Shirt off. Pants. They split when he yanked. He threw them away. She laughed. "Underwear second drawer from the top," she said. "Socks, too. Shirt on a hanger in the closet, pants next. Shoes on rack. Want a drink? Looks like you're in a hurry." He vanished. The man twitched on the floor. Ravenshaw reappeared. "Thanks." He grabbed the man and was gone.

A throng of people milled around the table. He dropped his victim on the floor and pushed through the crowd. He walked into an outer office and down stairs. Outside on the lawn he looked up and saw faces at the window. He vanished.

He stood in the Mier world on a sidewalk. He stopped the first woman walking by. "Where's the rose garden?" She began to hiccup. Her eyes turned up and she slumped through his arms to the brick sidewalk. He stepped over her and grabbed the next one. He repeated his question. "A loose muh-muh-man!" she gabbled. Her mouth turned to an ugly rectangle and she screamed and screamed. There were no other women handy. He disappeared.

He stood on a street. A small vehicle squealed to a stop. It had three wheels, roll bars and a flush-faced young man at the steering tiller. He cursed. Ravenshaw bent down, grabbed the bottom edge and flipped it over on its side.

He switched worlds again.

He was in a crossroads village. He walked into the general store and took a double-bitted ax from a rack. He was on the porch before the proprietor could close his open mouth. A buckboard was pulled up under an oak at the blacksmith's

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shop. Ravenshaw plucked the driver from his seat and threw him into the road. The blacksmith raised a hand sledge and Ravenshaw punched the ax handle into his stomach. He climbed into the driver's seat, unwound the reins and slashed the horse with the whip.

They rattled down the road, harrow points in the back leaping and jumping. The horse was run out in a couple of miles and the buckboard still on its wheels. Ravenshaw had stayed in sight of the river. When the terrain began to look familiar, he pulled the horse to a stop and tied the reins loosely.

He switched worlds.

Immediately in front of him was a rose thicket, briers as tangled as those that guarded Sleeping Beauty's castle. He took the ax from his shoulder and hesitated. He switched worlds and walked over the field toward the knoll ahead. He turned back to the Mier world and sure enough, it was crowned by the pergola and the gentle wind in his face carried the rose scent.

There was a tunnel entry. He surprised the guard standing in the shade and chopped her neck with the edge of his hand. Half a dozen unarmed women stood around the instrument console. The shield was up. He shoved the operator off her seat and drove the ax into the middle dial. He wrenched it loose and cut again.

A woman ran at him. He grabbed her wrist, turned and threw her over his back into three others. They all tumbled and he smashed the ax down one more time. The thing was smoking. It crept with blue electric fire. He stepped back.

Gertrude, Ayesha and the Dragon Lady came bustling through the tunnel with a herd of guards behind them. They saw four women tangled on the ground, two others cowering away, and a sweating, dirty-faced man standing with his feet apart, glaring at them. His polka-dot pants were skin tight, the buttons torn off his ripple-striped shirt. He vanished.

He stood on a sandy slope that ran down to the water. The river was so wide in this world he could not see the far shore. Six-inch-high waves curled onto the sand. A low furze grew on the gravel and crackled when he walked through it toward Nell Rowley, sitting on a rock by the water's edge.

She turned to him and her face was cut of ivory. Blood suffused her cheeks and she stood. "Where have you been, dear?" she faltered. "Supper's spoiled. The roast is dry and the potatoes burned. I wish you'd tell me—"

"I stopped for a few beers with the boys—I—" He was desperately thirsty. "Is that salt?" He pointed to the water.

"Yes, and I'm stuck with it. No

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more random swinging. I felt it stop. That's what makes it interesting. You never know in what world you'll be trapped forever—" She clutched the yellow band. "And I was taken to jail on that world where I didn't know if you were alive or dead. Do you know you were run down by a car built in San Francisco? A Hienie-Velox—" Her eyes were swimming. "I don't think I can stand it," she said thoughtfully, and tears spilled down her cheeks. She put her head on his chest.

He switched worlds.

They stood on the banks of the Sacramento, crystal and sparkling. Ravenshaw walked into the water, the sun was bright on quartz pebbles and fool's gold. He dropped to his knees and stuck his head under. When he surfaced he gulped like a horse and fell into a fit of coughing. He stood and wiped the water from his face. "Want a drink?"

She was being a statue again, fixed on the shore with a dazed expression. He scooped another handful of water to his mouth and waded out. "Let's finish it off and get the hell home."

"But it's impossible."

"It wasn't that stupid machine that flung us out of the flood. It was me. And away from those gawking kids. I was going to tell you, but I was kissing you instead. Look, I'm a weary, beat-up, dogface light-colonel in a wet clown costume, and I'm tired of the whole schmear. Let's go."

She put her hand on his arm and they walked up the hill.

He switched worlds.

The Mier women were swarming like disturbed ants. Ravenshaw held Nell's hand and pulled her up to the central platform.

"I want the man," he said. "I want General Craddock and that oily bastard and the skinny fellow. The ones picked up at the maypole dance in Texas. Shush." he said to Nell, who was tugging his sleeve. The Dragon Lady swept through the crowd.

Nell said, "Stupid! That's why I was being punished—"

"You are the not-impossible he," announced the Dragon Lady.

"I put them back in our world," said Nell. "That was my big crime, and when I came back to find you—"

"Together we will rule the infinite worlds!" said the Dragon Lady. "A male capable of transposition—"

"Who can also override a dog collar," said Ravenshaw. "Yes. I figured that out, but I've already chosen my consort."

He had been flying on inspiration, doing what he had to do with unlimited idiot abandon, and he closed that phase of his career flamboyantly. He knelt, bent Nell gracefully back over his knee and blistered a kiss on her mouth.

"Shoot!" screamed the Dragon Lady.

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But Ravenshaw and Nell were gone.

It was raining in New Glatz, Maryland. General Craddock paced up and down in front of the fire. It was after midnight. Ravenshaw sat in an armchair, a glass of gin and tonic in his hand.

Craddock sighed. "So you robbed a bank, bought clothes and tickets, flew to Washington, had dinner with the President and here you are. Anything else?"

"Well, we got Nell's toroid off at a lab in Sacramento. It came apart like tempered glass. I would be damned if I'd wait three days, so we were married in another Republic of California. Nell has the license. Lots of steel engraving. Very fancy. The President ordered up a bottle of champagne when we told him. New York State, but good."

"The bank's been paid back from discretionary funds. They were still wondering where the money had got to."

"He made me bird-colonel. Nell pinned on the eagles you brought over when you briefed him earlier. Thank you, Bill. He invited us to spend the night at his place, but we'd already accepted your invitation." He yawned. "We had a little talk in his office about the nature of man and society. You remember, virtue and fundamental values. Nell said that God doesn't look so good if absolute power corrupts absolutely."

"Did you reach any conclusions?"

"He had this idea about a scientific investigation and I had an idea about using my accumulated leave for a honeymoon. We mutually decided to hang loose. Who pays the piper calls the tune—if the piper needs money. He's a very pragmatic man." He yawned again.

"Me too. Good night, Arleigh."

Ravenshaw opened the narrow door and climbed the stairs. The rain was louder under the roof. Nell wore a watermelon-red housecoat in bed under a gold comforter in a puddle of lamplight. She marked her book and put it down. "What do we do now?" she said.

"We'll think of something."

"Hmm. I've been reading about Henry Wotten, Elizabethan poet, secret agent, diplomat."

"Are we going to talk about books?"

"Yes. His architectural desiderata were function, strength and pleasure. I think you meet those specifications for the house we'll build—"

"Quote him exactly, my empress. Because there you are in our castle of hours, in the country of the mind."

"Commoditie, Firmness and Delight."

He nodded. "Right on. Turn it out, Mrs. Ravenshaw."

"Arleigh!" she protested, and did as he asked. ■

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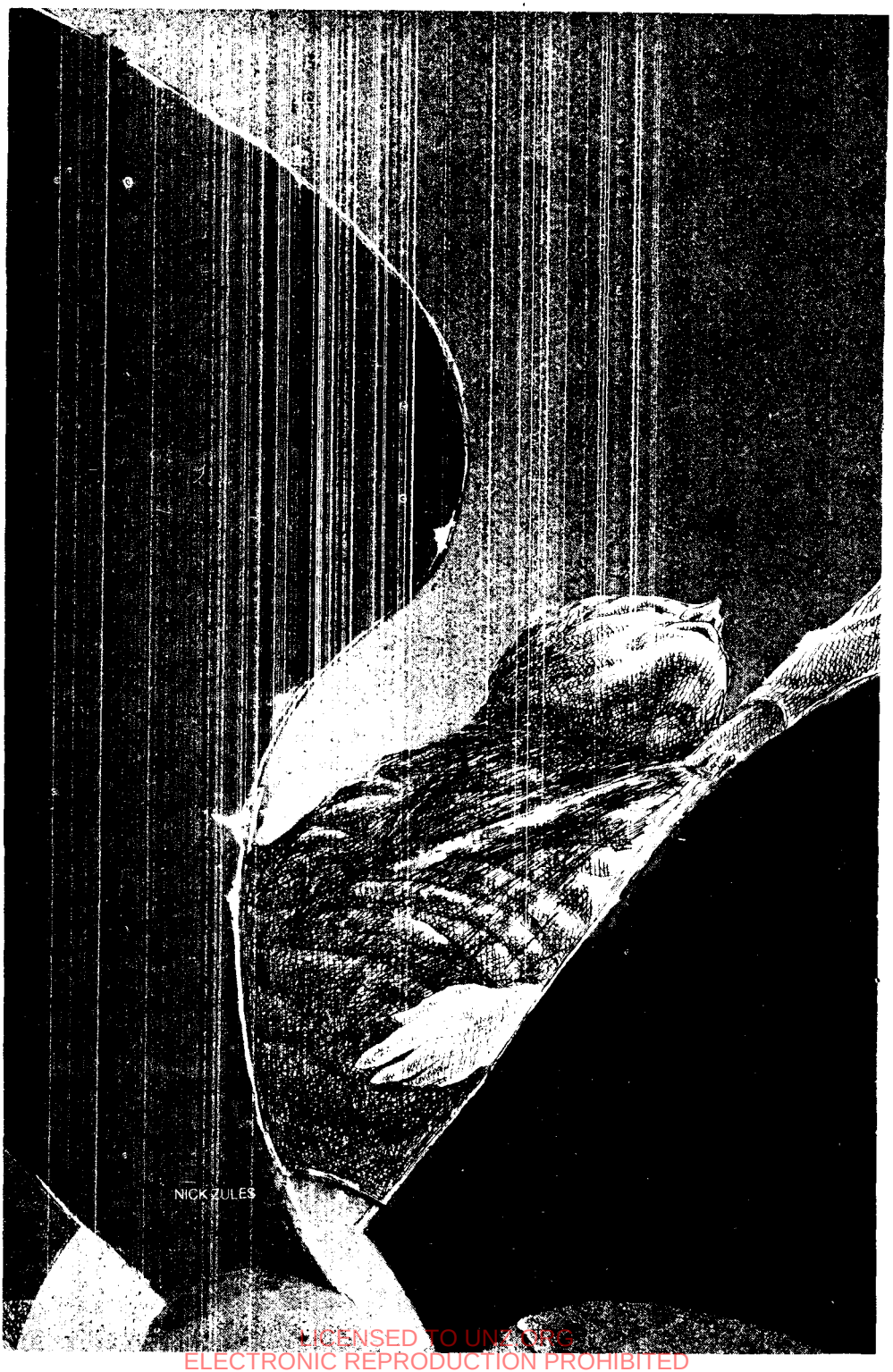

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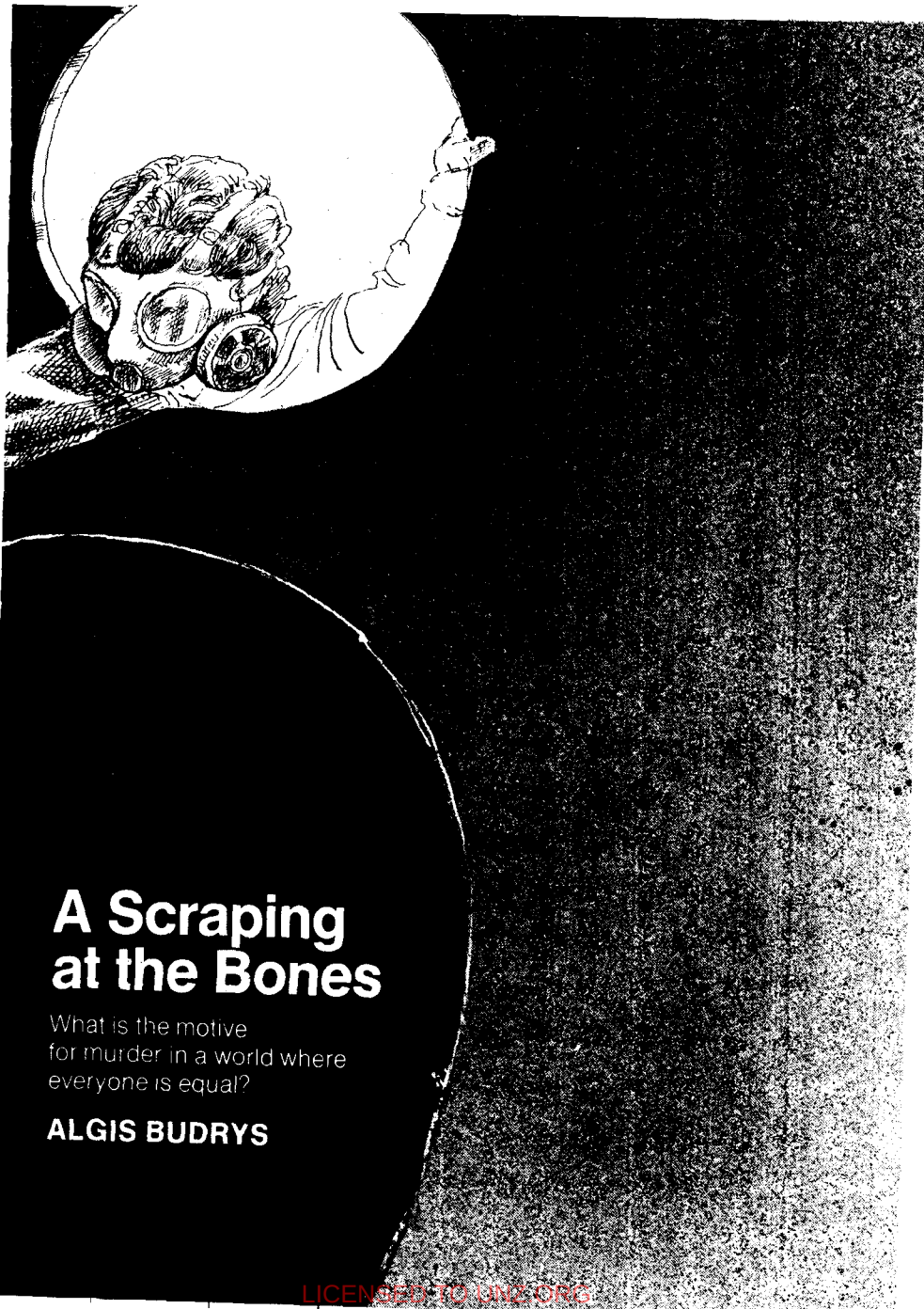

A Scraping at the Bones

What is the motive for murder in a world where everyone is equal?

ALGIS BUDRYS

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The Wastes Processing foreman was doughy and soft; looking at his greenish pallor and watching the convulsed workings at the corners of his mouth, Ned Brosmer wondered what would happen if the man lost hold of himself and began puking. Would it all come up—first the stomach, and then the very nearly similar material of the limbs, and then the pelvis and torso and ears, until finally the empty royal blue slick-finish coverall would be lying at his feet under a heap of something like oatmeal? "It's in there, Officer," the foreman was saying with a relinquishing gesture toward the open inspection plate, the wave of his arm ending with his hand in front of his mouth.

"All right," Brosmer said. "I'll look."

Down here, many levels below the dwelling units that clambered skyward in the complex shape of Panorama Tower, it was all pumps and tubing and worklights. The particular duct from which the smell came was four feet in diameter, and was painted an ivory white. Coded red decal symbols identified it as the north tower branch feed to the central waste macerator.

The hatch was a three-by-two plate, swung back and up; an extension light dangled over it, swaying from the cord as the constant air currents within the duct came gusting out. "Are we going to get flooded?" Brosmer asked, and the foreman shook his head violently.

"Hell, no!" he said. "We got this branch shut off back there, where the tube comes straight down from upstairs and makes that bend, see? There's this surge tank there, like you got to have, and you can use that big valve to block everything between it and here."

"Got you," Brosmer said. "Would a body pass through that valve?"

"No way. Jam it, maybe. But most likely it would just stay in the tank until the next time we cleaned it out."

"So it probably went into the duct right through this hatch."

"That would figure, yeah. Somebody came down here and put it in."

"Or it's suicide."

"You're kidding! Who would want to drown himself in—"

"I was kidding," Brosmer said. He had taken a respirator from his kit bag and was putting it on. His voice sounded remote in his ears, as if he were on dope. He sighed and looked into the duct.

The air flow was backing up from the hydrolizing tanks beyond the macerator, whistling against the torn edges of the thin metal blade that terminated the duct. The blade was designed to rotate at high rpm; it had shattered against something in the body, which had been passing feet-first through it without incident up to that point. Brosmer

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clenched his teeth, grasped one of the shoulders, and turned it over. A white male, middle-aged, hair gray, eyes brown, several post-mortem abrasions and superficial lacerations, and the apparently fatal puncture wound in the upper right-hand quadrant of the thorax. Made with a thin, long, sharp weapon, Brosmer decided, for he had seen the exit wound below the left shoulder blade. It wouldn't have bled very much; whatever rags had mopped up the spill had probably preceded the corpse down the duct, and were on their way to the farmers by now. And—Brosmer looked more closely. Right. A stainless steel replacement ball and Teflon socket for the original left hip joint. That was what had stopped the blade.

Brosmer drew his head and shoulders back out of the inspection hatchway. "Recognize him, Mr. Johnson?" he said to the foreman. "Take a good look. Sorry." He kept himself out of the way and put a hand on Johnson's elbow to urge him forward.

Johnson craned briefly, then stepped back. "No—I don't know him."

"He's just about got to live in this unit," Brosmer said.

"I don't see none of them. They're up there and I'm down here. There's thousands of them and three guys in my crew and me. That's the way they want it, and that's the way I want it. This is a different kind of place down here."

"OK," Brosmer said. No matter what, the longest delay in making an identification would be a routine four-hour turnaround time for the Social Security print files in Omaha; sooner if anybody wanted to rush it. He stripped off his examining gloves and dropped them in a waste can. "Somebody'll be along to pick it up."

"Is this all?" the foreman asked.

Brosmer looked at him with the appearance of great wisdom. "You mean, where's the sergeant and the lieutenant and the Chief Medical Examiner of New York City? Well, the sergeant's tied up collating officers' reports, and the lieutenant's in a conference with some sergeants. There'll be a photographer with the meat wagon crew. You see," he explained patiently, "this isn't a stage set; this is real. We don't need a lot of mouths full of dialogue to establish the plot."

"You're all the cop we're going to get on this case?"

"I'm 3-D and in color, Mr. Johnson. You can even feel me, if you don't get personal. That's good enough for an unidentified male found in a sewer."

"Well, you sure as hell look young to me, to be handling something like this all by yourself."

"That's right, I do," Brosmer said, packing away his respirator. "You've got my card. Call me if anybody starts asking you questions

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about the plumbing. I'm getting out of here. I hate dismal places." He turned back once: "Don't tell anybody about this, or I'll bust your ass to someplace where they use buckets."

At the lobby level, Brosmer walked through one Kasuba environment after another, eschewing their invitations to energy or lassitude, until he had reached the lobby area. He rang Building Management.

"Please state your business," the hologram said, and then caught itself. "Oh, it's you, Officer." Her lips took on fullness, but her eyes widened with something other than love. "I'll put you through to Mr. Vermeil." She faded, to be replaced by a naively interesting sculpture that rotated gently under lights, and with the sound of Japanese wind chimes, which in turn yielded to a representation of a man all in body-fitting burgundy crushed velvet. It seemed to Brosmer it was a little early in the evening for that, but perhaps the manager was an early riser.

"Yes, Officer?" Vermeil said busily, not having bothered to put down his frappe.

"There'll be a mortuary truck to get the body, so you'll want to alert your perimeter security people," Brosmer said. "A police photographer will take ID shots; you'll be expected to look at them, in case you can identify the victim. It's almost a sure thing he's one of your residents."

"Good heavens, Officer, *I* don't know every Tom, Dick and Harry who lives here! Why on earth should I?"

"Nobody ever calls you up about anything? You know, there was a time when tenants hammered on pipes for more heat, or had their dripping faucets fixed by the super. And the manager came around every month to collect the rent. They've got to be in touch with you now and then."

"I *don't* remember them, Officer. The bank evicts them if their credit goes, and Central Services has the building maintenance contract. They can hammer all they want to on their . . . *pipes,* did you say? Why, yes, Officer, there *was* a time when pipes brought on the heat, wasn't there?" He smirked.

"Vermeil, when the photographer calls you up and shows you the pictures, look at them. And remember it's a sworn admissible communication, whatever you tell him. I'll be in touch when I need you." Brosmer rang off. He went to the lobby doors and flashed his buzzer at the sensing devices. The inner doors opened, and he stepped into the lock. "NYPD Shield number 062-26-8729," he said perfunctorily. "One man going out."

There was a pause, and the intervening sound of wind chimes. Then the outer doors opened. He stepped into the raw air, grimacing, and

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walked toward the transit station, keeping clear of low walls and shrubbery. Above him, the brownish precast concrete settings clambered heavenward to frame waterfalls of reflectorized glass. As he walked, he rang a police channel and talked to his sergeant, telling him the story.

"What do you think, Ned?" the sergeant asked when he had all the data.

"I think somebody knows in his heart he got away with it. Thinks our victim's a bag of nutrient for the rutabaga. I'm going to get that sucker."

"Why do you suppose he wanted to obliterate the body? How'd he know how plumbing works?"

"What are you, Sarge—an old fire horse? Those are *my* questions."

"All right. You gonna be home?"

"Ten minutes transit time first. Thereafter."

"Good. I'll call you on a landline as soon as we have a working collation."

"I'll be there when I'm needed."

"Say hello to Dorrie for me."

"Should I give any particular name?"

Once on the train, he punched his destination on the coder in his armrest. When the straps went around him, the back of his mind thought of Dorrie. The train took off as soon as his interlock was made, and the front of his mind busied itself reviewing the people in the other seats. There were two or three persons with lunchbucket faces; technicians. The rest were pimps and whores. All of us personal servants make up the subway-riding public, he thought.

In the middle of his mind, he pondered an individual who could stuff a stripped corpse into the Jakes, but was too overwhelmed by his or her accomplishment to cut down through an old orthopedic scar and just check to see what might lie behind it. An amateur. But then, professionals just left 'em lying. There weren't any more feckless people. Everyone was numbered. When they died, there was a hole in the credit banks, the dwelling occupancy budget, the place where ongoing supermarket billings might be. There were no unmarked graves; IBM's tombstone punches represented more substance than the incidental flesh could ever show.

Please note, he told the place where he stored his experience: With the lower limbs absent, the free-floating position is face down.

He lived in Riverscene Heights. In the lobby lock, he said, "City civil servant," which put him in the system's admissible tenant class, and then gave his Social Security number. "One man coming in," he said for the voiceprint. In the motionless elevator, he gave his apartment number. In this building, the

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systems played music during intervals. When he had been properly scanned, the elevator unlocked and took him to his floor. He got out and walked down Hall 114, which also recognized him, and came to Door 11489, which let him in. Dorrie moved toward him out of the forefront of a crowd of dancers.

She was slight and dark, wearing black openwork hip-huggers and bronze jewelery; her long ashy hair fell over one eye; the apartment lights reflected from the amber lens over the other.

"Hello," he said.

She touched her upper lip with her tongue. "Welcome home," she said softly. They touched each other.

He couldn't get enough of her. Wincing, he pulled his shirt open so more of them would be touching. "Can't stay long," he said. "Working." She had put perfume on the top of her head. Her hands passed gently over his deltoid musculature.

"Home tonight?" she asked softly.

"Don't know. Probably not."

"I'll go down the hall, then. Iris Ruthven asked me to join her Bezant class with her."

He grimaced into her hair.

"You know," she said quickly, "that's not something you can do by phone." She leaned back in his arms, took off her glasses, and looked directly into his eyes. "I mean, when you all get around the table, you actually have to *touch* hands, or it doesn't work."

"Does it work if you do?"

"Oh, don't be so *rational!*" She tapped his bicep mock-pettishly with her glasses.

And don't be such a liar, he thought. Another thing worked better in the flesh, too. Why she thought she had to be so convincing and yet so transparent, he couldn't imagine. Husbands weren't supposed to be selfish, were they? But he was; he was, and he was pretty sure she lied to reproach him subtly, come to think of it.

"Rational is as rational does," he said. "There's one fresh soul I'd sure like to contact. I'll bet he's got a story he'd love to tell."

She danced away from him a little, replacing her glasses. "Are you on a murder?" she asked, her lips parting.

"Over at Panorama." He moved toward a chair.

"Where the *artists* live? Did you go inside? What are the units like? I'll bet they're *fabulous!*"

"They don't get any more cubic feet per body than we do," he said, dropping into the chair. "Besides, I wasn't up on the dwelling levels." He put his feet up on the edge of the daybed and sighed. He reached out and touched Dorrie's thigh as she moved about him. "Listen, I hate to cut off the party, but I want to watch the news."

She nodded. "'S OK." He switched off the hi-fi and the danc-

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ers winked out. Moving toward the bar, Dorrie rummaged, keeping one hip cocked so as not to break the contact between his hand and her leg. "Stick?" she asked.

Dialing the phone for Laurent Michaelmas, he shook his head. "Working," he reminded her.

"You're funny," she murmured fondly as the Michaelmas hologram formed a few paces to her left. "You wouldn't even be back downstairs before your head was all straight again."

"Working *now*," he said, evading the central issue.

"Good evening," Michaelmas said. He was, as usual, in a plain black suit. Looking at him, Brosmer thought that the self-contained, square-bodied man, with his economical gestures and his lively, intelligent face, might understand him. He hoped that someday an assignment would let them meet. But it seemed hardly likely: Brosmer wasn't even sure whether Michaelmas lived in Manhattan, and he worked all over the world.

"I just want *local crime*," Brosmer said to him, uttering the last two words distinctly.

Michaelmas nodded. There was a slight flicker. "Local crime," he said. He began a series of expositions, some of which involved Brosmer in the chase of a stolen boat, hunting over the riparian complexes like a midge among the stock shelves of a glass shoe store, sweeping down over the Hudson with a flurry of vanes and surging rpm changes in the turbines, whirling skyward again among the glittering windows as the thieves throttled down and circled disconsolately in the bay. In another sequence, ambulances ran mugging victims toward resuscitation centers, whistling among the pylons and freight ramps of the streets. Michaelmas' voice was crisp and measured, his data succinct. Dorrie, the broken end of a stick trailing between her enameled nails, smiled roguishly toward Brosmer and intertwined her limbs with Michaelmas, running her hands over the back shoulders of the suit, miming with such casual skill that Brosmer had to laugh as Michaelmas continued to speak and move obliviously. Only a few of his gestures surpassed her anticipation; at one point, his left arm protruded between her shoulder blades, but in the next she had recovered and was mock-biting gently with her white teeth along his forearm.

There was nothing about Panorama.

"All right," Brosmer said to himself, and to Michaelmas by way of good-bye as he dialed him off. The hologram disappeared from Dorrie's caresses. She turned and faced Brosmer slump-shouldered, dangling her glasses in one hand against her thigh and looking at him through her lashes. Her lower lip was tentatively between her teeth. She moved her feet. She

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reached behind her to fully opaque the window wall.

Grinning awkwardly, Brosmer shook his head. "You know we're on open police landline. George Holmeir could be calling any time now."

Well, what would he see that he didn't know first-hand? Brosmer thought as Dorrie smiled at him sadly. But her expression did change slightly at the mention of the sergeant's name. What would he see? Brosmer finished the thought. He'd see me. He might feel it was inappropriate.

And in fact Holmeir formed without preliminaries, between Dorrie and Brosmer. "OK, Ned," he said. "Here's what there is."

Brosmer shifted in his chair so the pickup would give Holmeir eye-contact with him. "Go ahead."

"Your DOA is Charles Castelvecchio. Resident at 25609 Panorama North, accompanied by Nola Furness Castelvecchio and one infant son. Castelvecchio was a writer on the *Warbirds of Time* series. Here's the stats on them; want to take it?" Holmeir held up the sheet. Brosmer nodded and activated his camera.

"Got it."

Holmeir put the sheet down on his desk. "OK. Now that's a positive ID. Positive. Fingerprints, dental charts, surgical records, every way we could do it."

Brosmer raised his eyebrows. "Thorough."

"*Had to be. He's still doing business; we reviewed his phone calls. He was part of a story conference half an hour ago. Seemed a little jumpy, but did his fair share.*"

"While he was down in that duct all the time."

"Dead twelve hours, Forensics says, and soaking in that thing for an hour before he was found."

"Killed in the building."

"Had to be. He didn't just materialize." Holmeir looked at Brosmer expectantly.

"How do you mean?"

"He never went in or out through any door. But the elevator wasn't used once all day. That's what the building tapes say."

"It's a glitch. You're getting a false memory readout."

Holmeir nodded. "Sure. Something screwed up in the building system. It happens. Of course, maybe nobody *did* use the elevator. That happens, too. So maybe somebody's found a way to make a hologram you can feel. Only which one is it—the dead one or the one that suggested sending a squadron of Spads to strafe Charlemagne?"

"Come off it, Sarge."

"Well, I'll be damned if I can explain it. But I don't have to. Sergeants sit and officers walk."

"How about the widow? Did you talk to her?"

"Come off it, Ned. How would I know she didn't do it? It's all yours. He's not even officially dead."

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Brosmer nodded. "It's a sweetheart of a case."

Holmeir grinned. "Yeah. I never heard of an MO like this. You're gonna be breaking new ground. They'll give it your name at the Academy—every time it ever comes up again, they'll call it a Brosmer. It'll be good for you when you're tired enough to apply for sergeant."

"And I'll apply for green feathers and fly to the moon," Brosmer said, trying to picture himself as Holmeir, and wincing.

"OK," he said. "I'll call in when I've got something."

"Right. I'm going off-shift in about an hour. But I'll leave a cue in my phone for you."

"OK."

Dorrie had moved around to where the pickup could find her. "Hello, George," she said.

"Hello, Dorrie."

"See you, Sarge," Brosmer said.

As soon as he was gone, Dorrie turned to Brosmer with her glasses off and her eyes full of stick. Hearing himself gasp, he knew there was nothing he could do to prevent it, or wanted to. Afterward, soft in his arms, blurred with lassitude, full of confidentiality, she murmured: "You silly, don't you know I don't see George any more; I've even mostly forgotten where he lives in this building. And besides, it's *you* I want to live with. You're so gentle with me," and he wished she didn't try so hard to teach a coherent understanding of the world to him.

It was funny how it all fell together. He had decided to call on the widow and see if there was any sense to be made of it. Appropriately dressed, his pockets full of supporting data, he walked up to her door as if it hadn't been his buzzer that had gotten him in, but when he rang at the door, nothing happened for a while. Brosmer stood plumply in the hall, thinking now about calling in for a warrant unlock, but instead the next door opened, and a man was standing there. "May I help you?" he said from under unceasingly restless eyes.

Brosmer shifted his feet in awkwardness and scratched the back of his neck. "Well, I don't know . . ." he said.

The man was tall and fleshy, dressed in a floor-length robe of figured iridescent orange. The flesh under one eye was jumping regularly, and his upper lip was wet. "It's all right. It's all right. I often come out," he said reassuringly. "The Castelvecchios aren't home; were they expecting you?"

"Well, yeah, Charlie left a cue in the system for me, and . . ."

"Strange. Yet he's not here. I'm Timothy Fortnum."

"Lou Marchant," Brosmer said. "I'm his cousin."

"Of this city?"

"Chicago," Brosmer said, having

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been there on a fugitive pickup once. Originally, he had been a young writer from the Bronx, for the widow's benefit, and he was shifting things around inside, watching Fortnum, looking nonplussed, wondering how a man could look so guilty and still keep talking.

Fortnum was calming down. "I knew he had no relatives in New York," he said, "Well, come in—let me offer you some hospitality while we straighten this thing out." He took Brosmer by the upper arm to urge him inside. Brosmer had to relax his muscles instantly to come off the pressure plates in the police undersuit beneath his garments, but his arm was only humanly resistant when Fortnum's hand closed on it.

Fortnum was much bolder now. His hip swung to bump Brosmer past him. Most of his attention was concentrated on closing and locking the door with swift, complex motions of his fingers.

"Sit down . . . sit down!" Fortnum said heartily, moving up behind him. "This is my wife, Martita. Darling, this is Mr. Marchant, Charles Castelvecchio's Chicago cousin, come to us unexpectedly."

Brosmer found himself having to look up. Martita Fortnum was leaning over the railing of an area to his left whose floor began at normal ceiling height. She was a slim, blonde woman in a red veil khaftan, her limbs long and straight, but aging as she descended a circular staircase. The elevated area, he saw, occupied the unit's worth of space above the Castelvecchio unit. Over his head, the ceiling, two ceilings high, supported a crystalline chandelier with soft lights playing upon it. Hanging gardens of opaque silky fabric draped the wall where three window frames ought to have been visible.

"I've never seen a place like this!" Brosmer said.

"Yes. I'm an architect. It's amazing what you can do. *Sit* down, Mr. Marchant. Tell us about yourself." His hand pressed Brosmer's shoulder. "Martita—bring our guest something, will you?"

The wall in the far corner was for shelves of books, a swing-down drawing board, and a prose encoder. Beside the encoder was a roughly similar machine—if he had not seen one in a documentary on popular music, he would not have known it was for editing tune material. All that space was occupied. These people had no visible food preparation area.

Fortnum's hand was still pressing. Brosmer let himself fall into the chair beside the wall between the Fortnum and Castelvecchio units.

Martita Fortnum had reached this floor. She turned with a fluidity strongly reminiscent of youth and passed through an opening behind the staircase. Its edges were fresh: unfinished. There were wall-

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board fragments on a dropcloth laid in the opening, and it led into the next unit. Martita Fortnum threw Brosmer a fleeting smile as she moved out of sight.

"What are you *doing?*" Brosmer asked, turning his face up to Fortnum.

"Why, we're entertaining you," Fortnum said heartily. "There's so much I want to know about you. Any visitor of Charlie's is bound to be such a surprise to me. He was saying to me just yesterday that he never received any callers." Fortnum put one buttock on the arm of another chair, which stood where the daybed ought to have been, and eyed Brosmer's face intently. A pair of huge antique geometrician's dividers, massive in bronze, each slender two-foot arm ending in a glistening steel point, hung on the wall near his right shoulder.

"It's an old cue," Brosmer said. "I called him weeks ago and said I'd be in town on business, and he put it into the building system for me right then."

"What business are you in, Mr. Marchant?"

"I'm a writer," Brosmer answered, slapping his pocket so Fortnum could hear the impact on the casette he'd put there when he still thought Castelvecchio had any survivors.

"Like Charles. Talent runs in families. Ah, here's Martita with some refreshment. Do you have any gifted children, Mr. Marchant? But you're so young—are you even married?"

"I'm a bachelor," Brosmer said. "In fact, I'm an orphan. Charlie's my only relative." He watched Fortnum's eyes widen in satisfaction. It was always so easy to believe what you hoped for. Brosmer reached out and took the goblet Martita Fortnum handed him silently, her broad mouth pursed quizzically, her eyes peering pale blue amid dark cosmetics.

"Have a drink," she said in a husky whisper when he held the rim to his lips. "Both of us have just had some, or we'd join you."

Ah, Jesus, he thought as he inhaled. It was a thing they called Swindle on the street; none of the successful pimps would use it, but the whores all did. It made things so easy. And she hadn't lied; you could see it in both their eyes—they were drifting and dreaming of tense cleverness, lazily riding the hurtling nightmare.

"A harmless relaxant," Fortnum was saying.

Oh, yes, yes, yes, Brosmer thought. In a little while, you can play music and I can dance, I can toss up my hair and be one with the wind, and when you speak to me, I shall answer in tongues that I learned as a child and forgot that I knew.

He pressed his arm against his side, firing Dexedrine into his body, and took a long draught. Amateur animals, he thought, gaz-

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ing amiably, his nostrils tingling with fumes.

"Isn't that better?" Martita Fortnum whispered.

"Mm-hmm," He smiled at Fortnum. "Do you know where Charlie is? He must have taken his whole family with him."

"Oh, as a matter of fact, they went slightly ahead of him," Fortnum said, and Martita Fortnum giggled.

He could feel it working on him; not just the Swindle gradually winning over the clumsily saurian rages of the Dexedrine, but the rightness, the inevitability of these monsters and what had been swimming in their systems long before entertainment chemistry had come along with snappily saleable products to validate it. What the hell am I doing here? he thought. I fly a Spad and these people are propelled by turbines.

He lolled his head back in his chair and looked up. There were brass placards in bronze frames hanging over where the door to 25709 could still be faintly made out in mid-air. Over the door to 25711, and over a bed, he imagined, was a nearly wall-width painting which, he deduced from what he could see of it, was of the ocean as one might glimpse it from a bower in a sea cave. The brass placards over the (permanently locked) door to 25709 were bas-reliefs of people in coveralls tearing patches off their clothing, baring buttocks and breasts.

"You killed them for their space." he whispered. "You chewed away their walls, and you stuffed them in the duct for their dwelling allocations."

Fortnum sprang to his feet. Martita recoiled. Fortnum stared at him goggle-eyed: "You're a cop!"

Brosmer lolled in his chair. He gestured idly with his goblet. "Cousin Fuzz." He keyed his phone to the DA's channels. "NYPD shield number 062-26-8729 arresting Timothy and Martita Fortnum, 25609 North Panorama, charge Murder 1 three counts with additional pending. Attempted Murder of Police Officer, one count. Stand by and monitor. Sit down, Fortnum," he said.

Martita Fortnum sat down at the foot of the circular stairs, one hand over her eyes, the other wandering idly, clambering unconsciously up the bannister to its fullest extension, then trailing swiftly back down to the newel post and clambering again.

Brosmer smiled from very far away. He held out his goblet to Fortnum. "Drink me," he said. "That's an order. You are being questioned."

Breathing sharply through white nostrils, Fortnum complied.

"How do you do it?" Brosmer said after the proper interval.

Fortnum sprawled. "Do what? Get through the walls? That's no trick—you just scrape away the ma-

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terial without nicking the sensors; you know, they're just all elementary. Thermocouples and manometers and things; standard hardware. After you get the wall structure cleared out, you swing all the wiring up so the sensors are reading each other; all the damn building systems care about is whether things are burning or flooding, or if the windows are broken. Then you hang drapes over it."

"Do architects know about plumbing?"

Fortnum raised his head and snorted. "What the hell do you think architecture is, these days? Everybody's got the same space allocation, and the building code's uniform, isn't it? What the hell makes a difference between units except the efficiency of the services? The hell, man, *you* could do it—dial up the library. It's all in there. Plumbing, phone systems . . . everything." A spasm crossed his face. "But *you* never thought of that. You're going home to your place, wherever it is, and dial up *Warbirds*, or do you watch cop shows?"

"I get along," Brosmer said. "Is that how you got to the elevator memory? Do you know about that from the library?"

"*You*'d have to. I *learned* it." It was amazing how much scorn and pride were getting through the Swindle. Brosmer took it in through the buzzing in his ears.

"The story conference," he said. "I can see how you might have learned to intercut tapes of Castelvecchio, but how did you fake being a writer?"

Fortnum giggled shockingly. He wiped his open lips. "Fake being a writer," he grinned. "Fake. Writers." He stood up suddenly and pulled the covering off the chair. Underneath was a metal cabinet. "There she is," he said fondly, running his hands over the home-joined crackled panels. He peered over his shoulder at Brosmer. "This is what it takes," he said, "you know. It's just an assembly of standard logic circuits. Nothing Buck Rogers about it. It's a synthesizing phone switchboard. You give it a lot of tapes of Charlie Castelvecchio sitting in a chair and babbling his life away, and when you speak into it, it puts his face on the phone and talks in his voice. Every time it can't match a lip-movement, it shows him turning his face away from the point of view or putting his hand in front of his mouth. It makes him look like he's got the jerks, but who's gonna notice that?"

"And it does the writing for you?"

"Writing? You simple boob, all you need is a hero the audience can identify with, and you give him an immediate serious problem. Then you introduce complications that get him in deeper and deeper, but in the end he does something characteristic on his own hook, and

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gets out of it. The rest is just atmosphere. You think that stuff in your living room is *art?* Listen—" He waved his arm and dialed. Music swelled up in the room. It thrummed and shook in the air. "That's art," Fortnum said, bracing himself against the wall with one hand. "That's a little ditty called *Jesu, Joy of Men's Desiring,* by Johann Sebastian Bach, the mightiest voice in the Public Domain." He dialed it off hastily. "You know what you can do with that? You can give it an up-tempo, write a set of words that make sounds like screwing but don't use the word, and you're rich. That's how that *momser* upstairs makes his living," Fortnum gasped, waving at the chandelier. And over *there,*" he panted, pointing into the emptiness above his bed, "is the woman who sculpts by dipping paper strands in epoxy and throwing them into the air just before they harden. I can be any of them. I can be all three of them and me, too, all at the same time. And what do you think of that, cop?" He turned, and for a moment his hand rested on the antique scriber. He looked over his shoulder guiltily at Brosmer. Brosmer shook his forefinger at him.

It was the woman who moved—who sprang from her place and flew to the wall, and so it developed that it was for her—for the To Be Widow Fortnum—that Brosmer had worn his suit. She gaped at him unbelievingly as his servos operated the auxiliary mesh skin over his body and gave him the speed and strength of ten, so that though she flew as the gannet, he struck as the hawk. And then it was over; she and her husband sat comforting each other with justifications, a police lock on their open phone and police locks on their door(s) as Brosmer made his way home.

Dorrie greeted him. Her eyes did not meet his. "You—you're home very soon," she said. "I haven't left yet. Do you want me to stay?"

He went over to his chair, walking around her as best he could, thinking. He thought of what would happen. Perhaps already, the libraries were being restricted in access. Only those with certain credentials, such as police buzzers, would be able to obtain certain classes of data.

"Ned?"

"What? Oh—no, no. you go ahead and do what you've promised. I've been thinking," he said. "Panorama owes me the standard rate on about seven Murder 1's, and even after I give George his 25-percent commission, and pay the bill from Forensic, that's pretty good. I think maybe we should get mirrors put in. On the walls . . . maybe on the ceiling."

Dorrie put her fingertip to her mouth. "It'll make it so much sexier in here," she murmured.

"Bigger," he said. "For a while." ■

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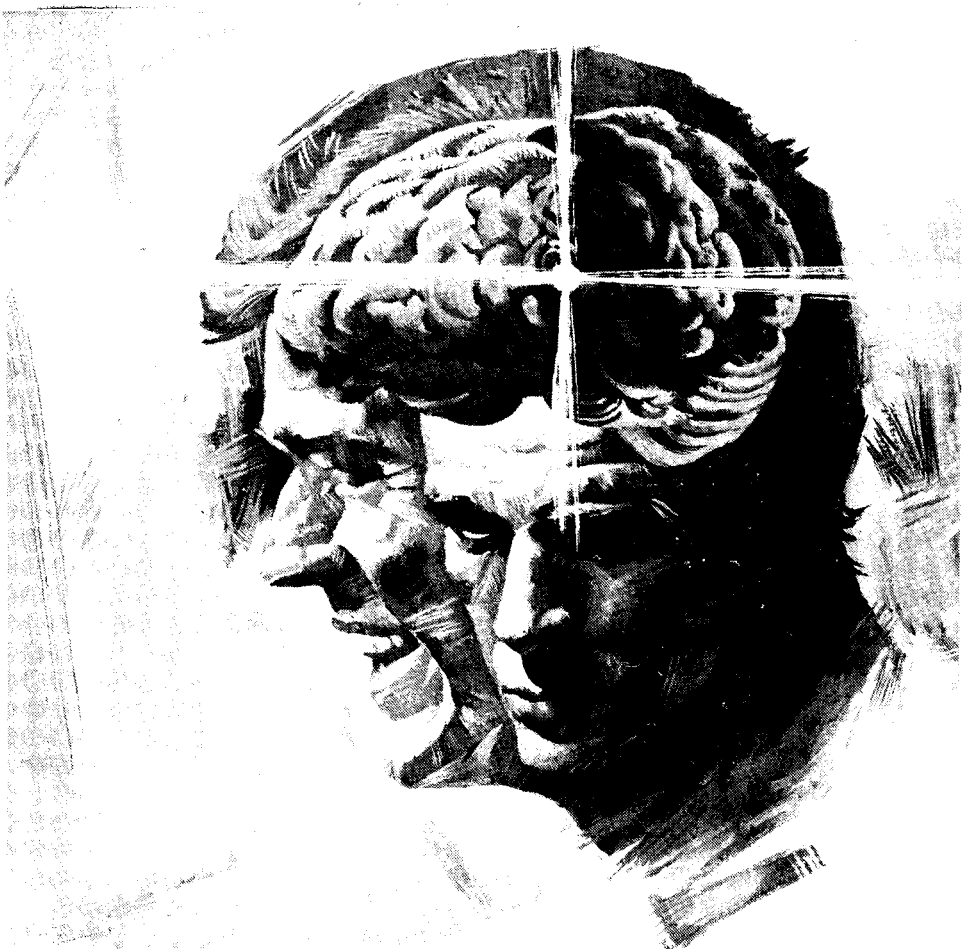

VINCENT DI FATE

To Top the Tallest Tale Told,
Try Telepathy!
SPIDER ROBINSON

two heads are better than one

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As usual, it was a pretty merry night at Callahan's when the trouble started.

I don't want to give the impression that every time us Callahan's regulars get to feeling good, there's drama around the corner. The reason it seems that way is probably that, barring disaster, merriment is the general rule at Callahan's Place. Most of us have little better to do than get happy in one another's company, and we're not an unimaginative bunch, so we keep ourselves pretty well amused.

This night I'm telling you about, for instance, was pretty typical, if there is such a thing as a typical night at Callahan's. Being a Wednesday, it was Tall Tales Night (as opposed to Monday, the Fireside Fill-More singalong night; or Tuesday, which we call Punday). Along about eight-thirty, when most of the boys had arrived, and the level of broken glass in the fireplace was still rather low (we believe in cremating our dead soldiers), Callahan dried his big meaty hands on his apron and cleared his throat with a sound like a bulldozer in pain.

"All right, gents," he boomed, and conversations were tabled for the night. "We need a topic. Any suggestions?"

Nobody spoke up. You see, the teller of the tallest tale on a Wednesday night gets his drinking money refunded, and most folks like to lie low until they've had a chance to examine the competition and come up with a topper. Not that the first tale told never wins—but it has to be pretty memorable.

"All right," Callahan said when no one took the lead. "People, Places or Things?"

"We did T'ings last week," Fast Eddie pointed out from his seat at the upright piano. True enough—I'd had everyone beat with a yarn about a beer-nut tree that used to grow in my back yard until I watered it, when Doc Webster wiped me out with the saga of a '38 Buick of his that understood spoken English, which would've been just fine except that it rolled over the foot of a rude traffic cop one day and expired from remorse. He claimed to have buried it in his back yard with full honors.

"Ain't nothing says we have to be consistent," Callahan replied. "We can do Things again."

"Naw," Doc Webster called out. "Let's do People."

"All right, Doc. What kind? You sound like you got something in mind."

"Wal . . ." drawled the Doc, and people checked to see that their drinks were fresh. Those who needed a refill put a dollar bill on the bar and were refueled by Callahan, who did not need to ask what they wanted.

". . . I was just thinking," the Doc continued, his own drink as magically full as always, "of my Cousin Hobart, the celebrated Man

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With the Foot-Long Nose." ("Oh, relatives tonight," someone muttered.) "Hobart's mother died in childbirth, naturally, and his father succumbed to acute embarrassment shortly thereafter. As a child Hobart was a born showman, keeping the orphanage in stitches with incredibly accurate woodpecker imitations, and upon attaining the age of seven he ran away to form the nucleus of a traveling road company which played *Pinocchio* in every theater in the country, garnering impressive reviews. This kept him in Kleenex until he outgrew the role, whereupon he struck off on his own and in short order became something of an old stand-by on the vaudeville circuits, where his ability to identify the perfume of ladies in the last row and his prowess on the nose-flutes (as many as five at one time) were a never-failing draw. He might have lived on in this way for a good many years, for he was a fanatically hygienic man, and although there were dark rumors about his sex-life he was invariably discreet. The young ladies he visited were for some reason equally reticent, even with their best girl-friends—let alone their husbands.

"No, it was not a cuckold's knuckles (say that three times fast with ice-cubes in your mouth and you can have this drink) that finally put an end to Cousin Hobart's career, though it might have been. It was by his own hand that, if I may put it this way, The Nose was blown. One night he retired early with only a slight head-cold for company, a yard-long handkerchief knotted to the bedstead. (Hobart went through a lot of laundresses before he found one with a strong stomach.) Thrashing in his sleep, he rolled over and contrived to wedge the end of his nose in his right ear. Sensing some obstruction, the mighty proboscis sneezed—and damned near blew his brains out.

"When his head had stopped ringing, a wide-awake Hobart settled down to some cold hard thinking. The incident could happen again at any time—the miracle was that so likely a phenomenon had taken so long to first occur—and next time the airseal might be better. Only by chance had Hobart survived at all. He reached his decision reluctantly, but he was a brave man: he followed through. He had his nose entirely amputated the next day, repudiating all traces of nose-hood and installing a suction cup in the middle of his glasses. Within a week he had landed a job with some moonshiners, and he works their still there still." The Doc took a long gulp of Peter Dawson and looked around expectantly, blinking.

There was a silence, not much thicker than an elephant's behind.

"A moonshiner with *no nose?*" snorted Long-Drink McGonnigle, who keeps a still in his own garage for Sundays when Callahan's is

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closed. "That's ridiculous. How did he smell?"

"Terrible," the Doc replied placidly. "Those moonshiners are *filthy.*"

A general groan began, but Callahan held up a hand. "What's the moral, Doc?"

The Doc blinked again. "No nose is good nose."

The sky rained peanuts, and very few missed the Doc, his more-than-ample upholstery making him an excellent target. Callahan, maddened beyond endurance, seized up a seltzer-bottle and was restrained with some difficulty. Me, I was worried—this would be hard to beat. I decided against another Bushmill's.

As I recall, the next one up was Shorty Steinitz, with the story of his uncle Mort D. Arthur the magician, who walked down the street one day and turned into a drugstore. But three of us shouted the punchline before he got to it and he pitched his glass into the fire in disgust, toasting, "To weisenheimers" first and putting his shoulder behind it. Then Tommy Janssen did a creditable job, W.C. Fields-style and better done than Fields usually is, about a Cousin Alex who used to hang from a hook on his kitchen wall and claim to be a telephone. "Obviously a masochist," Tommy intoned nasally. "The amount of abuse that man absorbed was incredible. Folks'd try to humor him, put a dime in his left ear, pick up his right hand from where it hung in his other ear, dial his nose around in a circle and listen to his hand. But when nothing transpired they would invariably beat him about the head and shoulders until the dime came out of his mouth, dislocate his arm at the shoulder and leave the premises in a rage, cursing prodigiously." This was pretty good stuff, but Tommy's moral, "A chameleon would do well to imitate objects of a species with which Man is not at war," was a little weak, and it seemed the Doc still (the Doc's still?) had the edge. Noah Gonzalez' effort, a one-joke story about an overaggressive uncle who customarily turned on the TV with such ferocity that one day the TV turned on *him*, was an obvious loser. For some crazy reason as each tale-teller realized he'd blown it and would thus be paying his night's tab, he invariably pitched his glass into the fireplace in disgust—which costs you your fifty cents change at Callahan's. The big red-haired barkeep had raked in a fortune in dollar bills (the only kind he handles) by the time I was ready to make my move, and I decided for the hundredth time that Callahan is no fool, even if he does have to sweep out that fireplace every morning.

"All right," I said at last, "it's time to tell you good people about my Grandfather Stonebender." I

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decided my country-drawl would serve best.

"You stole that from Heinlein," shouted Noah, the only other SF freak in the room. "One of the characters in 'Lost Legacy' had a Grandfather Stonebender who could do anything better than anyone. No fair lifting stories."

"Heinlein heard about the real Grandfather Stonebender from my grandmother," I said with dignity, "and toned him down for a disbelieving public. I'm talking about the real Stonebender–the man who built the pyramids, freed the slaves, invented the prophylatic, cured yaws–*that* Stonebender."

"Oh, *that* one," Callahan said wearily, and topped off my Bushmill's with an air of resignation which his twinkling eyes belied.

"Oh, not that his success was surprisin'," I continued smoothly, "as he was born with three heads. His mother was frightened by a pawnshop while she was carrying him. Doctor was so startled he gave up Scotch, and the child raised up such a racket cryin' three ways at once that they sent him home early, where he caused his mother some unforeseen difficulties with nursing.

"Fortunately he matured quickly and found early employ as the 'before,' 'during' and 'after' for hair-tonic commercials. Which kept him in hair-tonic, anyway. 'Fore too long, though, his combined IQ had brought him the prominence he deserved in several unrelated fields, and he passed his weekends doing a trio at the local ginmill for relaxation. *His* sex-life was something incredible, his prenatal trauma havin' also left him with three . . . but that's neither here nor anywheres I should be talkin' about. Point is, he wasn't no loser like Doc's Cousin Hobart, reduced to geeking at sideshows for a livin'. Grandfather Stonebender lived entirely off his wits–had to, to keep himself in neckties.

"'Course, the same strange fate that provided him with three times the brains and earning power of a normal man carried within it the seeds of his destruction. The three heads didn't get along too well.

"One day he was debating Free Silver with himself. It was a burnin' issue at the time, and sad to say, he lost. This made him so mad he punched himself right in the mouth, and broke several teeth and a knuckle. Bein' a gentleman, he had no alternative: he challenged himself to a duel. Next mornin', acting as second for both sides, he shot himself in the right-right eye from point-blank range and died. Papers were full of it at the time. 'Course, if you read the only daily around you know the papers are still full of it, but anyhow that's how Grandfather Stonebender passed on, from the past on."

Doc Webster's mouth hung open in astonishment, but Callahan

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again called for the moral before the general outrage could begin. "Just goes to show," I explained, "that three heads are bitter, then none." I closed my eyes and waited for the holocaust, smugly sure this Bushmill's was toll-free.

But the silence was broken not by groans, but by a single groan, and the pain in that groan was not put-on at all. It came from the open doorway across the room, and as we all spun around we beheld a young sandy-haired man, shockingly disheveled, leaning against the doorframe and sobbing. As we watched, frozen, he slid from its support and fell full-length into Callahan's, landing on his face with a crash.

Somehow I knew intuitively that I was not a winner tonight after all.

For all his bulk, Doc Webster was the first to reach the newcomer. He rolled him over and began doing doctor-things almost before the rest of us had started to move, and swung his great black bag in a lethal circle when we crowded too close. Nobody ignores pain in Callahan's Place, but I guess sometimes we're a little too eager to help.

The kid wasn't much older than Tommy Janssen, maybe twenty-five or so, but you had to look past the haunted lines of his face to see it. At first glance he might have been thirty or better, and the expression he'd worn before he passed out would have looked more at home on a man eighty years old and tired of living. His eyes were set in close against a hooking nose, and his cheeks were broad enough to make his mouth seem a hair too small. His lips were the kind of full that isn't especially sensual, and his frame had just a little bit more meat than he needed. His clothes seemed to have been pulled on in the dark in a hell of a hurry, fly unzipped, shirt only partly tucked in and buttons mismatched with holes. Furthermore he was dressed for June—and it was a particularly rainy February out. He was soaked clear through, hair that looked usually brushed back lying limply across half his face.

It looked like he'd gotten to Callahan's just about in time.

His upper cheeks and temples were livid with purple bruises, and his knuckles were swollen. Doc Webster searched his hair and found more contusions beneath. "Looks like somebody gave this guy an awful beating," the Doc announced.

The kid's eyes opened. "That was me," he said feebly, swallowing something foul.

Someone fed the Doc a glass of straight rye, and he tipped a little into the kid's mouth. It seemed to help. Color came back to his pasty face, and he tried to get up. The Doc told him to lie quiet, but the kid shook him off and made it as far as the first table, where he fell

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into a chair and looked around groggily. He didn't seem to notice us, but whatever he was expecting to see scared him silly.

It wasn't there; he relaxed some. Callahan was already piling corned-beef sandwiches in front of him, and the table happened to have a pitcher of somebody's beer already on it. Throwing us all a grateful glance, *seeing* us this time, he fell on the food like the wolves upon the centerfold, and got outside of three sandwiches in short order, washing them down with great draughts of beer.

When he was done he looked Callahan square in the eye. "I don't have any money to pay you," he said.

"I didn't figure you did," Callahan agreed. "Go on, eat up. They were getting stale—these bums here don't eat, far as I can tell. You can owe me."

"Thanks. I'm OK now, I think. For a while."

The Doc wanted to get something straight. "You put them bruises on your own head, young feller?"

"Jim MacDonald, Doctor. Yes, I put most of those there."

"I'll bet it felt good when you stopped," Long-Drink said, and immediately regretted it. I wouldn't want Doc Webster's mass balanced on my toe either.

"If it did, I might stop more often," MacDonald said with a ghost of a grin, wincing at the sudden pain in his temples. "Lately it's the most fun I have."

"Want to talk about it?" Callahan suggested delicately. Nobody pries while Mike Callahan's around, but a gentle prodding is never out of order.

"Sure, why not? You'll never believe me anyhow. No one would." MacDonald's grin was gone now.

Callahan drew himself up and registered wounded dignity. "Son, this here is Tall-Tale Night at my place, and I am prepared to believe anything you can say with a straight face. Hell, I sometimes believe the Doc over there, and his face ain't never been straight. Come on, spit it out. Maybe you won't owe me for them sandwiches and beer after all." The big Irishman put a fresh light on his ever-present El Ropo and gave the kid a fresh beer to lube his mouth with.

I looked around; the boys were reverting to their favorite listening positions as naturally and gracefully as Paladin used to go into that gunfighter's crouch of his. *The hell with the budget,* I decided, and slapped another single on the bar, helping myself to another shot of Irish uisgebagh from the bottle Callahan had never replaced.

"It started with my brother Paul," MacDonald began, and I groaned inside. A perfect shaggy-dog story, shot to hell. "He was ten years older than me, and he was really only my half-brother. Dad

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divorced and remarried when Paul was only three, and that's why I had some hope for a while.

"You see, Paul was a mutant.

"Not in any gross physical sense—his body was not malformed in any detectable way. But he was an Instantaneous Echo.

"You've probably heard of them, maybe seen one on TV or read about 'em in places like Charles Fort. From the age of twelve, Paul could mimic anything you said—at the instant that you said it. The voice and inflection were different, but he never stumbled, even when he didn't comprehend the words he was parroting. No noticeable time-lag—he simply said what you were saying, as you said it. Sometimes he actually seemed to jump the gun by a hair, and *that* was really strange.

"Around the time I was five, a couple of fellows from Duke came around with a truck full of equipment and put Paul through a series of tests. At first they were quite excited, but as the testing continued their excitement wore off, and eventually they told my father that Paul was just like all the other Instant Echoes they'd studied, simply a man who'd learned how to hook his mouth in parallel with his ears. According to their newest findings, he could not in fact 'jump the gun' as he sometimes seemed to, and while the actual lag was small, they claimed to be able to measure it. They were unhappy—they'd hoped to prove that Paul was a telepath.

"Me, I think he got cagey.

"Paul had always been an introspective kid and about that time he got moodier than ever. He seldom left the house, and when he did he was quite likely to return in tears, claiming a migraine as the cause. My father got our doctor to prescribe some strong stuff for the migraines, but it didn't seem to help for too long. Paul, having finished high school at fifteen with excellent grades, showed no interest whatever in college, a job or girls. He appeared the typical loner, with a bit of hypochondriac thrown in.

"It was about then that the trouble started between my father and mother (Paul's stepmother, you understand). She felt that Paul had to earn a living regardless of his headaches, and insisted that he should do so at sideshows and on nightclub stages, doing his Instant Echo routine. Dad was having none of it—he'd made a good deal of money with a good deal of hard work, running a used-car chain, but he was perfectly willing to indulge a temperamentally infirm son, rather than set him on a stage to be gawked at by yokels. Mother was . . . not a very nice person, I'm afraid, and I suspect she thought of the child she had inherited as an untapped gold-mine scant years from his majority. I think she wanted Paul to make a bundle while she could still get at it—she'd always had some of the

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Backstage Mother Complex. How I managed to remain neutral I'll never know—but then, nobody asked my opinion.

"When Paul was twenty and I was nine and a half, I got my first big scare.

"It was all an accident, for by this time Paul had become uncannily adept at avoiding people, leaving the house only after dark and never straying far. The only spot he showed any affection for was the abandoned gravel pit a few miles from home, a place so gloomy at night that even the area's love-struck teenagers avoided it. I went there with him two or three times—Paul seemed to accept my company more often than anyone else's particularly when I was younger. I didn't especially care for the place myself—it seemed to me the loneliest place I'd ever imagined—but I suppose a kid will follow his big brother just about anywhere he's invited.

"I think that must be where he met the girl.

"Mom and Dad were out that night at a PTA meeting or some such. I was watching TV, and if you want to know the truth, I was eating some stolen jelly-beans from the hoard Mother used to hide away for herself. So when Paul came crashing through the front door, I jumped a foot in the air before I even saw him. When I got downstairs, my first crazy thought was that the migraines had finally split poor Paulie's head open. He looked . . . well, I guess I've given you a pretty fair imitation tonight, crashing in here the way I did. His scalp was laid open around the sides of his head, his forehead was dripping blood in lines that streamed crazily over his face, his fingers were raw and bleeding, and his eyes held so much agony that even at nine years old I was more terrified by them than by anything else.

"He was babbling incoherently, swinging his arms wildly as if to ward off some closing demon, and sobbing as though his heart would break. I'd never seen anyone his age cry like that, you know? I rushed to his side and got him to sit down, and without thinking about it I went to the bar and mixed him a martini just as Mother had taught me to do for her. Little enough of it went down his throat, but it calmed him some, and the rest at least got some blood off his chin.

"Of course, when he'd calmed down a little I asked him what had happened. 'She looked so nice, Jimmy,' he raved, 'so *nice*. I thought it would be all right. I mean, I knew it would be bad, but I thought I could take it. *She looked so goddamned nice,*' he shrieked, trembling like a leaf. Finally I got the story out of him in bits and pieces.

"It seems my brother was a telepath, after all.

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"A latent telepath, at any rate. From age five to fifteen, his only telepathic manifestation was his Instant Echo bit, and that was done unconsciously. During that time he never received thoughts except those about to be verbalized, never sensed emotions, and never had any conscious volitional control of his wild talent.

"But about midway through puberty the picture began to change. His power was still beyond his control, but it *grew*. With no warning, he would suddenly find himself inside someone else's head, with increasing frequency and for increasing lengths of time. The first time he plugged in was for a split-second only, just enough to scare him silly, and it didn't reoccur for a couple of months. By now, he told me, telepathy came to him every week or so, for as much as five or ten minutes at a time.

"You must understand, this was nothing like telepathy as it appears in science fiction stories. It was not the ability to send messages without speech—Paul had never succeeded in sending anything. Nor was it the ability to receive messages. It was, rather, a process of entering the skull of another, receiving its entire contents and perceiving them as a gestalt.

"I wonder if you can imagine what that's like? Perhaps, if you've ever thought of telepathy at all, you've thought of how terrible it would be if someone were inside your strongest defenses, privy to all your secrets and desires and shameful memories and frustrated lusts and true feelings. Well you might—but have you ever considered how terrible it would be to find yourself in someone *else*'s head, with all that unsought and unwanted knowledge? As long as people remain locked in their own skulls, they should be—because as most people intuitively realize, the things that grow and fester inside a sealed skull aren't always fit to share.

"On top of that, there's the sheer shock of directly confronting a naked ego as strong as your own, and Paul told me that night that it doesn't help a bit that the other ego is unaware of you. Most people never get over believing that they're the center of the Universe, even when they know it isn't so—to have your nose rubbed in it is unsettling.

"And so, Paul told me between sobs, he began avoiding people the best he could as his strange and terrifying power grew in him. Repeated exposure made the minds of his immediate family tolerable to him, and his telepathy seemed to be sharply limited by distance, with an effective radius of about a hundred feet or so. By keeping strangers beyond that limit, Paul could achieve peace of a sort, the flashes of telepathy bringing him only glimpses of Dad, Mother and myself. Dad he pitied with an intensity heretofore unknown to that

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emotion; Mother he hated beyond all understanding; and me he often found soothing, until I grew up enough to start having dark secrets of my own. He told me some things about myself then, that . . . but that's irrelevant.

"The point is, that night, communing with himself in the moonlit gravel pit, he met a girl, about his age or a little older. One of the strange things about out-of-the-way places is that, while you almost never meet anyone there, anyone you do run into is somehow very liable to be friend-material. At any rate, she seemed to Paul the nicest and most gentle girl he'd ever seen in his life, not at all like any other girl he'd ever met. She spoke softly, and only when she had something to say, and he felt in her a *difference* that he could not explain to me in words.

"Whatever the reason, he let down his guard for once. Instead of running away or driving her from him with rudeness, as he had learned to do with strangers, he stayed to talk. Before too many minutes had passed, he began to lose the usual terrifying fear that his wild talent would strike, began to believe that it might be all right if it did, began finally to almost hope that it would.

"And it did.

"I'm sure she was a lovely girl, but the best of us harbor dark secrets—sometimes even from ourselves. I don't know specifically what shattered Paul that night, but I'm sure it was nothing that a bishop on his deathbed would have felt compelled to confess. Maybe it was nothing more dishonorable than her lifetime's accumulation of pain, for one's own pain may be bearable by its familiarity and yet staggering to a stranger.

"In any event, it hit Paul even harder than usual, because he had dared to hope. Now, if your ears are overloaded, you can stuff your fingers into them; if your nose is outraged, you can hold it; if your eyes are blinded you can shield them with your arm. But when your brain itself is overwhelmed by direct input, all you can do is smash at it with a rock, hoping to drive the other consciousness away with your own. Sometimes, if you're lucky, it works.

"For Paul, that night, it hadn't worked.

"Now you must understand that I was very young. I barely comprehended the things that Paul was telling me, and if I understood what had happened, I surely didn't understand why it had hit him as hard as it obviously had. Being able to read minds had no drawback that my nine-year-old mind could see; I sure didn't know much about human nature. But I was trying hard to empathize with my big brother.

"That's the only explanation I have for what occurred. Because as Paul reached the terrible climax of

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his story, for one split-second a shutter opened—and like a camera plate, my child's mind was imprinted with the total contents of the mind of my brother.

"It only lasted that split second, and it faded about as fast as a flashbulb-burst from two feet away—the impact was over quickly, but the blinding afterimage seared my brain for many seconds more. I screamed. Several times. Instantly our positions were reversed, and Paulie was holding me, restraining my hands. He knew at once what had happened, and the grim set of his jaw said that he had been expecting it for years now.

"'It's over,' he barked, 'Jimmy, listen to me, it's over. It won't happen again for months, maybe years.'

"It wasn't what he said but the pure joyous relief of how *far away* his voice sounded that cut through my child's terror and brought me back from the edge of hysteria. Why, Paulie was *miles* away—at least a foot! And there were comforting walls of bone, cartilage and skin—and blessed empty air!—between us. I calmed down rapidly, and Paulie held me tightly in his arms and in savage whispers explained to me what I was, what had happened to me and what I could expect from now on. He had hoped, he said, that I would be spared because my maternal genes were different from his: he explained genetics to me, as well as it can be explained to a nine-year-old, and he told me what a mutant was. He told me how much easier to bear the telepathic flashes would become, and he told me how much easier they would not become. He told me how often to expect the onslaught ('flashing,' he called it), and advised me on how to avoid flashing by avoiding sentient beings as much as possible. I suppose you could say it was the end of my childhood. I know that four years later, when my father haltingly undertook to explain the Facts of Life to me, they came as a helluvan anticlimax.

"I suppose the next landmark in the story is the night my father and I found Paul collapsed across my mother in the livingroom, the lamp that had crushed her skull still clenched in his hand, but I don't think I want to talk about that now. They took Paul away that night, like a sack of sugar, and hauled him off to King's Park, completely catatonic. He's been that way ever since, and as far as I can tell he never flashed again. Or anything.

"That was fourteen years ago."

Callahan had been filling his glass as he talked, but MacDonald spilled this one over half the table. He drank the rest as fast as it could pour and shut up.

"I get it," Fast Eddie said after a while. "Yer afraid de same t'ing is gonna happen to you."

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"Jesus," Doc Webster said in an undertone behind me, "he's just about due." I did some rapid mental calculation, and turned pale.

"No, Eddie," I said aloud. "Jim's overdue. Unless . . ." I let it trail off.

MacDonald grinned hideously, shook his head. "No, friend, I haven't killed anyone yet—though I wouldn't care to make any predictions for tomorrow. No, my pattern didn't follow Paul's after all. Not precisely, that is. For one thing, I never was an Instant Echo.

"I waited for the next flash all through adolescence, and when it hadn't come by the time I graduated high school I dared to begin to hope that I was different. By sophomore year of college, I'd shoved the fear back into the far corners of my mind, and convinced myself that my one fleeting experience had been a freak, perhaps Paul sending instead of receiving for once.

"In junior year it hit again, in the middle of a party. I was paralyzed—there were *twenty-one people* there, and for one awful second I was sure my head would burst from overcrowding. I learned more about human nature that night than I had in the previous twenty years, and I very nearly died. I passed out eventually, but not before I'd gained an undeserved reputation as an acid-head and lost my girlfriend.

"From that point on, they started coming again and again. The next flash was six months later, the next four and a half, then five, then three, then I stopped keeping track. Right now I'd guess they hit every few days, but I'm not sure. I can't tell you an awful lot about the time between them." His head dropped.

"Why do you suppose your pattern was different from your brother's, Jim?" Doc Webster asked.

"I'm not sure," MacDonald repeated without looking up. "Maybe the different heredity, maybe random chance."

"Perhaps," I put in, "it was getting your first jolt so much younger than Paul did. Maybe the trauma hit you so young you hadn't come to accept limits on your mind yet, and your subconscious whipped up some kind of defense that lasted as long as the trauma did."

"Maybe so," MacDonald said, glancing up at me with hopeless eyes. "But if it did, it's forgotten how to do it again. And my conscious doesn't know the trick." He giggled. "I haven't even improved on Paul's trick with the rock." The giggle dissolved into hysterical laughter, and his beer-glass shattered on the floor as the table shook.

Callahan's broad hand caught him open-palm across the cheek, rocking him in his chair. His laughter cut off, and his shoulders slumped for a second. Then he sat

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up very straight and stuck his hand out soberly. Callahan shook it gravely and produced a full glass of beer from nowhere; MacDonald took a grateful sip.

"I suppose I should say, 'Thank you, I needed that,' Mister . . . uh . . ."

Callahan told him his name.

". . . Mister Callahan, but to tell you the truth I almost think I'd rather do it myself." He looked around at the rest of us and his face went all to pieces and he buried his head in his arms. "Oh, *Jesus.*"

"Listen, Jim," Tommy Janssen spoke up quickly, "what the hell did you do after that party? I mean, dig, you couldn't stay in school, right? Too many people, flip you right out. What did you do, go home and become a loner like Paul?"

MacDonald spoke listlessly. "I tried, brother, I tried. I went home and told my father everything—why his second wife had died, and what Paul was, and what I was—and that night he got up to get a drink of water and dropped dead in the bathroom.

"Thank God I didn't flash that.

"I got out fast after that—I got a flash of the man who ran the funeral home that almost did make me a murderer. So I took off, and got myself the only job I was suited for."

"Lighthouse?" Chuck Samms guessed.

"Nope. No openings; there almost never are. But the Forestry Service can always use fire-lookouts. Miles from anybody in a well-stocked cabin with nothing to do but watch the forest spread out below you. I even got lucky: the area I drew averaged thirty-five days of rain every summer, so I got to sleep late a lot. On hot days you stand a twelve-hour watch.

"God, it was peaceful." He was talking freely now. "I think I got a flash from a bear once, but it must have been at the extreme limit of my range. Then one day I flashed a bluejay as it sailed about six feet over my head, and that was . . . just *beautiful!*" He shivered. "Almost worth the rest of it."

"What brings you this way?" Callahan wanted to know.

"What else? The expected: a forest fire in my zone. Called it in fast, and then got too close to a fire-fighter who was trapped by a deadfall and roasting slowly. My boss figured me for an epileptic and fired me as gently as he could. I didn't argue the point. I had a little money saved up—I came back east."

"Why?" Callahan asked.

"To see Paul. To visit him."

"Have you?"

"No, damn it, I couldn't get near the place. I flew right into MacArthur, doped up with sleeping pills so I'd sleep through the flight over New York City, and rented a car when I landed with the last of

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my bankroll. I intended to drive on through and hope for the best, but halfway out of Islip I flashed a guy in the next lane. He . . . he was a drug-dealer. Heroin and cocaine."

Tommy Janssen's face went hard as rock, and he gripped his beer-mug like a bludgeon.

"I was very, very lucky," MacDonald continued. "Any crash you walk away from is a good one, and that's what I did—just left the wreck married to a tree, climbed up the embankment and walked away. I walked for *hours*, and not too long ago the town supervisor of this town we're in drove past me in his big limousine and I flashed him. The next thing I knew I was in here, talking a blue streak. Hey, how come you guys *believe* all this?"

We looked around at each other, shrugged. "Dis here is Callahan's Place," Fast Eddie tried to explain, and somehow MacDonald appeared to understand.

"Anyway," he went on, "that's the whole story. King's Park is a long way from here, and frankly, gentlemen, I don't think I can make it any farther. Any suggestions?"

There was a long silence.

Fast Eddie opened his mouth, closed it, opened it again and left it that way. Shorty scratched where it itched. Doc Webster sipped thoughtfully at his Peter Dawson's. I racked my brains.

Callahan spoke. "One."

MacDonald started, turned to face him. He looked Callahan up and down from his thinning red hair to his outsized brogans, and sat up a little straighter. "I would like very much to hear it, sir," he said respectfully.

"Contact Paul from here," Callahan said flatly.

MacDonald shook his head violently. "I *can't*. I told you, this thing can't be controlled, dammit."

"You said 'no' a little too loud, old son," Callahan grinned. "Maybe you can't do it—but you think you can."

MacDonald shook his head again. "No. I don't *want* to flash him. Don't you understand? He's catatonic. A vegetable. I just want to see him, to try to speak with him."

"Why use words?" I asked.

"They're less dangerous, damn you," he snapped. "If you fail with words you can say to yourself, 'gee, that's sad,' and go do something else."

"What else?" Doc asked. "What did you plan to do after you saw Paul?"

"I . . . I don't know."

"Well, then."

"Look, what could it possibly accomplish?" MacDonald barked.

"Maybe a lot," Callahan said quietly. "Here's how I figure: Paul found a way to block the flashes out—a defense. But he found it at the end of his rope—so he just

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threw it up and slapped ferrocement over it, and he's been huddling inside it ever since." Callahan took the cigar out of his mouth and rubbed his granite jaw. "Now you're in sorry shape but, old son, I don't judge you to be at the end of your rope yet. Paul was continuously telepathic by the time he killed his stepmother, wasn't he?"

"Yes, he was," MacDonald admitted. He was thinking hard.

"Well, there you are. If you can reach him, remind him of what it was like not to flash, maybe you can talk him into coming out from behind that shield, and using it only when he needs it. In return, maybe he can teach you how to build the shield.

"What do you say, son?"

MacDonald grimaced. "I can't flash at will. The distance is too great. Our maximum fields of sensitivity don't reach each other by several miles. I'm not due to flash again for at least a day or two, and Paul . . . doesn't flash any more."

"All right," Callahan rumbled. "Those are the reasons why it can't possibly work. Now, why don't you try it?"

"Because I'm afraid, dammit!"

Doc Webster spoke up softly. "No reason to fret, son. We'll keep you from hurting yourself." MacDonald looked around at all of us, started to speak and paused. His eyes were terrible to see.

"That's not what scares me," he admitted at last, in a voice like a murdered hope. "What scares me is that I may establish contact with my brother and *not* be able to kill myself."

Callahan lumbered around behind the bar, brought a sawed-off shotgun from beneath it and laid it on the bar-top.

"Son," he said firmly, "if you need to die I'll see that you do."

A couple of jaws dropped, but nobody objected.

Except MacDonald. "What about the police?"

"That's my problem, burglar."

MacDonald's eyes seemed to see a far place, and I hope to God I never see it myself. I suppose he was examining his guts. The suspense hung in the air like the electric calm before a cyclone, and nobody made a sound.

After a long, timeless moment he nodded faintly. "All right. I'll try, Mister Callahan."

We relaxed a trifle in our chairs, and then tensed right back up again. Callahan put out his cigar and laid a hand on the shotgun, unobtrusively waving Chuck and Noah out of the line of fire.

MacDonald sat up bolt upright, put his hands over his ears. He opened his eyes real wide, looked around one last time, and closed them tight. His brow knotted up.

Now, I don't know quite how to explain just what happened next, because it doesn't jibe with what

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Jim MacDonald had told us. But I figure that if he was a telepath, some of us at Callahan's are pretty fair empaths. Maybe he was tapping us himself, maybe not. All I know for sure is that all at once the lights were gone and I wasn't in the bar anymore, and Callahan and the Doc and Fast Eddie and Tommy and Long-Drink and Noah and Shorty and Chuck and I were all crowded together somehow, *touching*, like we were rubbing shoulders in back of a truck we had to push-start. We didn't waste time wondering; we put our backs into it.

That's crazy, there was no truck, not even a hallucinatory one, but I guess it describes the sort of thing we did as well as words can. We . . . *pushed*, and just like with a truck there came a time when the thing we were pushing gave a hell of a shudder and took off, leaving us gasping far behind.

The thing we were pushing was Jim MacDonald.

The lights came back and the familiar sights of Callahan's Place came back and I was alone in my skin again, looking around at Callahan and the rest of the boys and realizing with surprise that I hadn't been the least bit scared. They were looking around too, and it was a few seconds before we saw MacDonald.

He was sitting rigid in his chair.

THE ANALYTICAL LABORATORY

The AnLab is your chance to tell us which stories you like best, and thereby reward your favorite authors with solid cash. It works this way: send us a card or letter with a list of the stories in each month's issue, ranked in the order in which you preferred them. We average the votes and publish the results here. The story that comes closest to having an average of 1.00 (which would mean it received a first-place vote from everyone voting) earns its author an extra one cent a word: $100, in the case of a 10,000-word novelette. The story in second place receives a half-cent extra per word.

May 1975

Place	Title	Author	Points
1	Lifeboat (Pt. 1)	*Gordon R. Dickson* and *Harry Harrison*	1.90
2	The Tax Man	*Stephen Robinett*	2.98
3	The Negotiators	*Keith Laumer*	3.51
4	The Hunters of Tharsis	*Bob Buckley*	3.60
5	Equinocturne	*Bob Chuck Wilson*	3.65

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trembling like a man with a killing fever. Doc Webster started for him like an overweight white corpuscle but pulled up short and looked helpless. The air around MacDonald's head seemed to shimmer like the air over a campfire, and we heard his teeth gnashing.

Then, not suddenly but gradually, almost imperceptibly at first, he began to relax. Muscles unknotted, joints unlocked, his face began to soften. He . . . I don't know how to say this either. He *wore his face differently*. The MacDonald he loosened into was changed, somehow older.

He had won.

"Our deepest thanks, gentlemen," he said in a more resonant voice than he had used so far. "I think we'll be all right from here on."

"What will you do now?" Callahan rapped, and I wondered at the cold steel in his voice.

MacDonald considered for a moment. "We're not really sure," he decided finally, "but whatever we do, we hope we can find a way to help other people the way you've helped us. There must be lots of things we can do. Maybe we'll finish school and become a psychiatrist like I planned. Imagine—a telepathic headshrinker."

Callahan's hand came away from the trigger of the scattergun for the first time—Jim/Paul didn't catch it, but I did. I was rather glad to know that the world's only two telepaths' intentions were benign.

Callahan looked puzzled for a second, then his face split in a huge grin. "Say, can I offer you fellows a drink?"

And MacDonald's new voice echoed him perfectly.

"Don't mind if we do," he added, laughing, and got up to take a chair at the bar.

"Hey," Fast Eddie called out, ever one to remember the really important details, "wait a minute. De cops'll be lookin' for youse fer leavin' dat accident. Whaddya gonna tell 'em? Fer dat matter, whaddya tell de shrinks at King's Park?"

"Oh, I dunno," Callahan boomed, putting a careful double-shot of Chivas Regal in front of MacDonald. "It seems to me a telepath could dodge him a lot of cops. Or a lot of witch-doctors. Wouldn't you say, gents?"

"I guess so," MacDonald allowed, and drank up.

And they were right. All three of them.

I haven't heard much from either of the MacDonald brothers yet, but then it's only been a few weeks, and I'm sure they've both got a lot of thinking and catching up to do. I wonder if either of them is thinking of having kids. One way or another, I expect to be hearing good things of them, really good things, any day now.

It figures. I mean, two heads are better than one. ■

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the reference library *Lester del Rey*

THE DARK FANTASTIC

A friend of mine once tried to point out that my idea of science fiction embracing the possibilities of all literature must be wrong. He took my statement that science fiction is properly a literature of ideas—not necessarily good ones, but ideas nonetheless—and indicated that this would preclude its inclusion of the fiction which was essentially anti-idea, either in basic assumption or in development.

Well, superficially, there does seem to be such an area of fiction. One of the better examples might be Huysmans' *A Rebours*, which is based on the assumption that sensation, of any kind, is the ultimate achievement. To my taste, it's the finest example of a novel of decadence, particularly since its style (at least in the original) is admirably adapted to its intent. More recently, Kerouac's *On the Road* comes to mind with its aggressive anti-moral self-indulgences.

These are dark, moody stories that seem to have no central ideation. Yet both do require a driving central idea (however much opposed to my ideas) supported by a development that has to be a play of related ideas (however well concealed in Kerouac's case). The primacy of sensation or the superior morality of anti-moralism bother me no more than the idea that huge dragons can fly by psi-power. About the only dark area that does bother me is the assumption by Aldiss and Harrison that limits literature of quality to the reflection of the essential "tragedy of man." Being a man strikes me as no more tragic than being an amoeba or a nothing. However, if they could turn that empty phrase into an idea, I might accept it for fictional purposes.

I'm afraid my friend was confusing a dark anti-intellectualization of mood with an absence of ideation. And while stories of that dark mood were once almost lacking in science fiction, the last fifteen years or so have certainly produced enough of them. Ballard comes to mind at once. And more importantly, Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*, whose execution left me with nothing but admiration.

Now science fiction has produced another supposed magnum opus which is being billed as "the major novel of love and terror at the end of time." Of course, it doesn't involve any love to mention, has very little real terror, and doesn't take place at the end of time. But for various reasons, it does bring to mind the three novels I've deliberately mentioned previously—all of which *are* major novels of their type.

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This novel is **Dhalgren,** by Samuel R. Delany (Bantam Books, 879 pp., $1.95). For number of pages per dollar, it's a bargain. And that's about the only good thing I can find to say about it.

Of course, it's obviously meant to be "art," not mere fiction. You can tell that at once, because it begins in the middle of a sentence and ends (finally) in the middle of another sentence. We know this is art, because James Joyce used the same trick in *Finnegan's Wake,* published in 1939. Delany loves this touch of originality, as is shown by the fact that he also uses it for many of the sub-sections in the novel.

It must also be considered Significant and Relevant, since it takes place in no real place and involves no people who live within a real society or social matrix.

Essentially the story (?) deals with Kid, who cannot remember his name, though he can remember all kinds of other incidents about his previous life. After a brief encounter that has little relation to other events, he wanders into a city called Bellona. Bellona has been struck, apparently, by some undescribed disaster, which seems to be why he wants to get in. Something has driven most of the population out, leaving approximately a thousand out of hundreds of thousands who once occupied it. There is mention of burning and destruction hither and yon, never very specific. Anyhow, Kid gets involved progressively with a homosexual with a hoarding complex, a group living as a commune in the park, Lanya—the closest we come to a normal girl—who accepts him, a group of assorted drop-outs known as scorpions, and a clique that more or less hold themselves aloof while claiming to run the city, and various artistic people. While leading the scorpions by default of other leaders, Kid also writes a book of poetry that is instantly published and acclaimed, leading to all sorts of literary discussions. Then one day something or other drastic happens to the city, scaring Kid into leaving.

The title derives from turning our old monster Grendel (from Beowulf) around somewhat. I suppose that's Significant as a Symbol. There's an assortment of other symbols, I'm sure—though most of them seem to be lacking in any referents that reveal anything to the reader. Thus there is a notebook which Kid lugs around with him much of the time and in which he writes his accounts and his poems—which we never get to read, mercifully. There are a couple of places in the book where it seems that the notebook contains writing by someone else (?) which covers Kid's own experiences in the past or to come. He seems a little upset by this once or twice, but then disregards it. There is also an "orchid"—a weapon of knives to surround the fist when clamped to the hand. Somehow, it always seems to be with him, even when he leaves it behind. I assume that is supposed to be of importance, though nothing much comes of it.

The trouble is that nothing much comes of everything. There is the required (for modern artistic writ-

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ing) use of drugs, but it seems humdrum and routine, with no particular significance. And there is a plethora of sex, even beyond current requirements for this type of book. I can't think of anything left out in that respect—except some measure of emotion mixed with it. Sex seems to be something that the people do to fill their time—and in the end, even they seem to be pretty bored with it. Long after all the permutations have been exceeded, the book drags on with casual recapitulations.

There are also a fair number of fantastic elements—not the elements of fantasy, but simply things that are strange. Not least of these is the city itself. It has been wrecked for weeks, at least—but water runs, hot and cold, and the lights on the streets still work. Some sockets in the buildings mysteriously don't work, but there is still electricity available to run elevators. There is a constant haze of smoke from burning—but the city seems to continue through more weeks without its boundaries shrinking.

At one time, they discover that they seem to have two moons in the sky, one of which they promptly name for a rapist who is basically the most heroic and noble figure in the book. There is also a time when a huge other sun seems to rise in the sky, first red and then blue, but it produces no effects to speak of, so it is quickly forgotten. And there are the chains that are essential to becoming one of the scorpions. These are ornamented things of assorted types, apparently wound around the body. When powered by a battery, they create an illusion of being some weird beast of light—scorpion, basilisk, what have you. Lanya also makes a dress of some wonderful fabric that can be powered to create marvelous light displays.

Nevertheless, this is definitely *not* science fiction! These are simply little bits of the fantastic tossed in without meaning or cause, having no basic effect on the story. They could come out of the novel without changing a thing. Bantam labels it as science fiction—but that's simply to give it a handle for sales. It isn't even fantasy, in any sense other than that it utilizes a few fantastic but unrelated incidents plus the illogic too often associated with bad fantasy.

It isn't a story of violence, either. There is casual violence, certainly. But none of the major characters in the story are basically violent or even angry about anything. They seem more like displaced persons, unwilling to do much of anything beyond rustling up food and drink—of which there's plenty in the city—and having sex to fill in their boredom. At best, they're rather pathetic. Delany seems to have borrowed all the weakness of the books I mentioned in my prefatory remarks and to have stripped the ideas of anything that gave them strength. The pursuit of decadence doesn't pursue. The anti-morality becomes insipidly moralistic. And the underlying anger that Burgess used is sadly lacking. Things just drift—and drift—and drift . . .

Even what seems to be some kind of human relationship turns

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out to be nothing. There was the promise of some human link between Kid and Lanya, but in the end, when Kid finds the city threatening him, he goes off without her, unthinking and uncaring. The things that promised significance have none. Thus, after all the buildup of chains, orchids, et cetera, the characters find a warehouse where such things have been imported in huge quantities. There must be some explanation there. But they simply go away, forgetting it.

There are indications that it may be all a delusion of madness, with Kid imagining it in some institution; he was in one once before. If so, the delusional system resembles no classic syndrome, which would provide a far more interesting logic around which to construct fiction. Anyhow, that idea has been used far better and far too often before this; and who cares what happens in a dream or delusion where anything at all can happen?

What is it? Precisely. It's a whatisit. It's an empty thing, where words simply go on and on. And after 700 pages of learning to cope with that, Delany suddenly finds ways to make it more disconnected and less meaningful by playing with unoriginal tricks of typography.

My considered reaction is one of seemingly infinitely prolonged boredom.

After that, it is a great pleasure to turn to a novel of science fiction by a new writer—and a very promising one. **The Warriors of Dawn,** by M. A. Foster (DAW Books, 272 pp., $1.25), is not a great book, but it is a highly readable novel with some excellent thought and background. It also uses sex, but that use is entirely different from too much of what passes as daring in science fiction.

There is, of course, nothing either good or bad about sex in fiction. It depends on how and why it is used. If it is patched in with the hope of shocking the reader or to show that the writer can write about it, it's almost automatically bad. If it's used because it's an integral, natural part of a story—and particularly when it can only happen *in* science fiction—*it* can be very good indeed. This is a novel where its use is thoroughly justified and where it is handled with taste and emotional reward.

In this future, there are two kinds of people spread out through the galaxy. One kind is our normal human type. The other is a race that was created by geneticists as an experimental effort to build a superman out of human genes. The ler, as they are called, are not really supermen; but they are highly different men. Humans and ler are not cross-fertile. And the ler, through the necessity of keeping their gene pool stable and through certain major differences in their fertility cycles, have developed customs completely different from normal humans.

But for reasons of plot, a human male named Han and a ler female named Liszendir are sent together to spy out what seems to be a threat to one planet from an aber-

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rant, aggressive group of warrior ler from the planet Dawn. The two are overcome—logically—and forced to wait together for rescue. In their isolation, they each discover much about the other—and about themselves. And they find themselves drawn together so strongly emotionally that sex is inevitable.

This has consequences throughout the novel, as it should. There is a great deal more story than this, involving capture and the real people of Dawn, as well as a menace from outside. Most of this is very well handled. My only real quibble is with the use of what is called a "story-block" as a sort of mechanical *deus ex machina.* But it's permissible, I guess, since the human and ler had already solved most of their problem without it.

All in all, it's a far better than average adventure story with the welcome addition of a soundly motivated emotional problem and good characterization generally. I enjoyed it.

Considerably to my surprise, I also found myself enjoying **The Science Fiction of Isaac Asimov,** by Joseph F. Patrouch, Jr. (Doubleday, 271 pp., $6.95). Most of the works of so-called criticism that have come from English professors have struck me as being pompous and self-serving, without any real understanding. (There was an earlier book which analyzed the writing of Asimov according to how long the words were and how many words per sentence!)

But Patrouch is both lucid and cogent. He begins (as a work of critical nature should begin) by laying down his criteria of judgment. These are about as "non-academic" as they can be—as is always the case with really good academic work. He really uses these to determine the elements that a good story should have. I found they were surprisingly similar to my own basic criteria as a writer, reader and reviewer.

Then he examines Asimov's science fiction against those criteria. Obviously, Patrouch knows that fiction very well indeed, and he is thoroughly familiar with science fiction as a field. He knows the conventions of the field, and how Asimov uses them. And he looks for the approach that makes the work of Asimov different from what preceded it. He admits to a pro-Asimov bias, but this doesn't seem to interfere with his critical abilities as he lists virtues and faults in the stories. Most remarkable of all, he knows when what is seemingly a fault can become a virtue.

(I'm a little biased, too, because he agrees with me that Asimov's *End of Eternity* is one of the best of the novels.)

It isn't quite the definitive investigation that the cover promises; I doubt that a definitive work can be done so soon after the work it examines. But it is the best piece of criticism of any writer in our field that I have yet seen. Like all good criticism, it should make the reader of Asimov find new things in the stories. I think every real Asimov fan and teacher of science fiction should get a copy at once. ■

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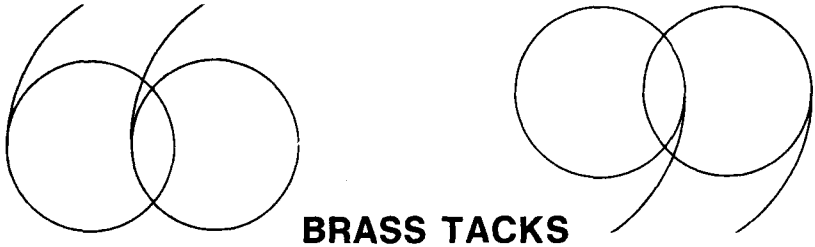

BRASS TACKS

Ye Editor,
Brauss Tackes
Ye wordsmythe DICKSONNES talent unbedowte
Full manye factes drakonic hath brot owtte
Wyth cheerfulle witte and hys myndes sharpe worke.
To caville wyth hym ys to semble a jerkke.

Yt passeth thro mye sensibles, non ye lesse,
Hys tempral rymsters grasspe of YNGLESSE
Suffreth not onlie from prononciation scraumbled
But from ye verb-tense not fulle apt preaumbled.

Tys only yn ye present tense, and yn ye singularre,
Thatte YNGLESSE followes—y hope notte too farre—
Wyth verbes terminatying yn ye "eth,"
Whyche lispeth gracefullye yn previous playce for "es."

One Sage, he praiseth—two or more could notte,
Especiallye yn ye past, y wotte.
And ye ynvention outright, "cameth," y sayye,
At noe tyme hath byn etmologicly okayye.

Tys but a minor quibble, and yt passeth—
But we'll discuss this further, Dickson,
Over glasses.

—Algis Budrys

Glasses of mead, no doubt!

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Dear Mr. Bova:

The January 1975 issue of your magazine was in my hands just before the holidays. For this copy you have my thanks three-thousand-fold. Not only did you have some very good short stories in this issue, but you also had a work by Joe Haldeman. This author has surprised me by becoming one of my favorite writers. I hope I'll be seeing more of him in the future.

The best (like all good things) I mention last: the special feature by Gordon R. Dickson on Igneos research. I could describe it as a true Christmas gift, but that wouldn't completely cover it. Ever since you published the works of Anne McCaffrey on these giant but gentle creatures, I've been a true supporter of them. I hope from now on you'll publish some more information about them.

ELIZABETH A. WILSON
38549 Courtland Drive
Willoughby, Ohio 44094

Several readers have commented on the Igneos piece, and asked how they can write to a dragon, as suggested in the poem. All dragonly correspondence should be sent to Ms. Ann Cass, Editor of the Dragon-Runners' Chronicle, *PO Box 449, Argo, Illinois 60501.*

Dear Ben:

Whilst Gordon R. Dickson's scholarly work on the current state of Igneos research is much to be commended, I feel that his position on the wrong side of the Atlantic has made him miss certain obvious points.

In the first place the fact that the language used resembled Fourteenth Century *English* points to the fact that the time-traveler must have returned to England. The manuscript is unlikely to have been kept otherwise.

Second, the nineteenth stanza refers to a ragged, rather wild but beautiful country, whilst stanza twenty-three refers to a "halfe a myle sheere cliffe" which, as any Welshman will tell you, is a figurative translation of Plynlnon Fawr. All this leads us to that beautiful country of Wales.

But wait! What flag would Dragon-Runners fly at their guild meetings? Well, as any student of Wales will immediately tell you it is a red dragon, as is still to be found on the Welsh flag of today.

The Igneos Society of Great Britain is currently carrying out an extensive search of Wales to determine the meeting points of the Dragon-Runners' Guild so that we can arrange meetings with these fine creatures. Anybody wishing to help by spending their holidays searching Wales for these elusive spots is asked to contact the Aleerystwyth office of the Welsh Tourist Board.

M. T. BRYAN
6 Thornhill Close
Ansor Road
Dane Bank, Denton
Manchester M34 2HS
England

And bring your track shoes!

Dear Mr. Bova:

Being an active member of the FDRA (Fourth Dimensional Research Association) for many years,

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and heading the Literature Department (which explores the effects of the fourth dimension on past and present writings), I was both amazed and delighted to observe Analog experiencing that phenomenon with which I am so familiar, the *p*lanar *d*imension *d*isplacement of *p*rinted *m*aterial. When this common happening takes place, printed material (in this case, Analog itself) is removed from the three-dimensional world and transported to a higher dimension, which in this case, I believe, is the fourth. I have not studied this particular case in depth, but most *pddpm* is removed to 4-D, though in some rare cases, it has been reported to go as high as the 8-D and 9-D. The case I am speaking of is, of course, the case of the issues of Analog which came out between the January and February 1975 issues. If you will note, the January issue is recorded as being Vol. XCIV, No. 5, and the February issue is Vol. XCV, No. 2. The question is: What happened to Vol. XCIV, No. 6 and Vol. XCV, No. 1? The answer is: They have been victims of *pddpm*. If any readers could provide further examples of *pddpm* for research, I (and the FDRA) would be extremely grateful.

DAVID A. KLEIST
204 South Main Street
Telford, Pennsylvania 18969

Actually, the answer is that Condé Nast has decided to change the system by which the volumes of all their magazines are numbered. By the new system, there will be one volume per year; thus, January 1975 should have been Vol. XCV, No. 1. Unfortunately, it was too late to change the old volume number, as the January issue had already gone to press. Our explanation seems much more mundane than yours, but then most explanations of seemingly mysterious phenomena usually are.

Dear Mr. Bova:

I really must compliment you on the January issue of Analog. I thoroughly enjoyed it, from cover to cover (this to show you that I don't write letters just to "nit-pick").

I do, however, have a question about the disease Lepcer in *The Indian Giver*.

The name Lepcer gives the disease quite a horrid aspect. But, denoting it as it seems to, a mixture of leprosy and cancer, it also provides us with a hopeless paradox.

Both leprosy and cancer are diseases of cell reproduction, but the relationship ends there. Whereas leprosy has symptoms of less cell reproduction, cancer has just the opposite: ultrafast cell reproduction. Even if such a disease could exist, wouldn't the two symptoms just sort of cancel out?

TOM TOLMAN
22 Bradley Place
Stamford, Connecticut 06905

"Lepcer" was not supposed to be a combination of leprosy and cancer. It was a particularly gruesome form of cancer that produced leprosy-like lesions.

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Editorial

continued from page 9

poll, and give press-agent's answers to predigested questions. We will not get such leadership unless we demand it, and hold it accountable once it is voted into office.

In the final analysis, we need something beyond patriotism. I don't think it was merely patriotism that motivated men like Nathan Hale or Colin Kelly or Joe Schmidt. Or Jefferson, either, for that matter.

Too often, patriotism boils down to, "My country, right or wrong," or its modern evocation, "America, love it or leave it." It is possible to love this nation of ours and still realize its shortcomings. It is *necessary* to change our society, because without change it will soon die.

What's the word, the symbol, we're seeking. Perhaps it is *idealism.* An overworked word, a word that's often looked upon askance. A corny word. Yet it was the ideal of a free and democratic people that gave those Massachusetts farmers the backbone to stand up against British regulars. It was the ideal of the inherent liberty and dignity of all human beings that guided Jefferson's pen, and ultimately produced the Bill of Rights.

Colin Kelly wasn't thinking of the need for expanding markets for the US steel industry when he nosed his plane into its final suicide dive. Perhaps he should have been, but if he was thinking clearly at all, it was probably something about

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in times to come How to describe Roger Zelazny's new novel, "Doorways in the Sand," which begins in next month's issue? Well . . . if you've read Zelazny's earlier novels you'll be totally surprised, because this one isn't anything like his previous work. If Raymond Chandler were around and writing science fiction, he'd produce a plot about as intricate as this one. But it wouldn't have the humor that "Doorways in the Sand" has. Or the dash and daring. Or the clever aliens. That's what it's not. What it *is* is a story about a perpetual college student, who's being hounded by his faculty adviser to graduate. But if he graduates, he will lose his inheritance. And he likes college life, especially because he's an acrophile, and there are so many marvelous roofs to stroll on, and drainpipes and chimneys to climb, and . . .

Well, read it yourself, starting in the June issue. John Schoenherr has painted another of his strikingly beautiful cover illustrations.

Professor Irving Michelson takes a balanced and dispassionate view of the planetary dynamics of the Solar System, in an attempt to shed some rational light on the Velikovsky controversy. His article, "Velikovsky's Catastrophism: A Scientific View," is the science fact article next month.

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the absolute need to protect, preserve and defend the form of society that we have built in America.

Without the ideals, there is no nation. Merely a milling crowd of self-seeking, clamoring individualists who are all trying to be first in line for a free handout. That way lies dictatorship or anarchy.

With idealism, patriotism can be something to be proud of. We have enormous energy and power. A time-traveler, looking backward, sees that we have created the wealthiest, best-fed, longest-lived society in the history of the world. We have achieved political dominance on a worldwide scale, and backed away from creating an empire, not merely once but twice. We have reached the Moon, and done it with such casual ease that the world was astonished by it.

We have the energy, the power, the skills and strengths needed to solve the problems we face. Do we have the will? That is always the central question. The brain and muscle are there, but what's happened to our hearts?

By their fruits you shall know them.

This is the real tragedy of the Nixon Presidency, and the Watergate conspiracy, and the whole tenor of our modern public relations era of politics:

It has taken the idealism out of politics. It has taken the heart out of a once-proud and mighty nation.

THE EDITOR

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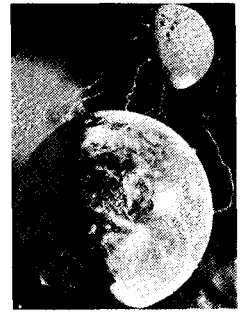

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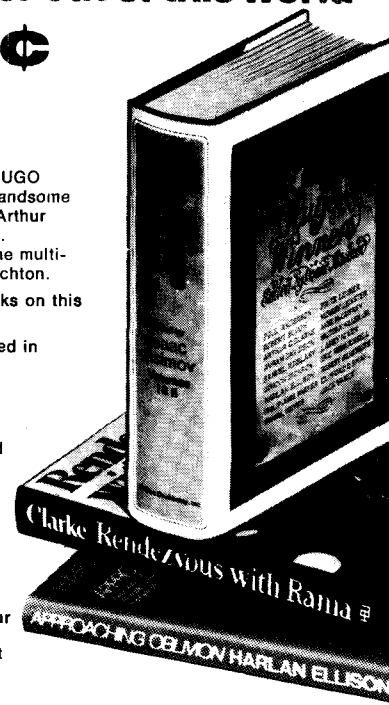

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